00077521

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

PROBATION.

A Novel.

77521

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN.'

'Life let us cherish!'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1879.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

00077521

PROBATION.

BOOK II.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER X.

'Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly.'

ONE fine morning, Mrs. Mallory, her son, and Hugo von Birkenau sat at breakfast, and the young men maintained a decorous silence while the lady held forth on what was at present her favourite topic, the approaching ball at Castle Hill, in honour of Helena's coming of age.

'Helena will be the belle at her own ball,' she observed. 'I called the other day, and Mrs. Spenceley showed me her dress. It had just come from Paris. It is perfectly exquisite. Even you, Sebastian, will be able to find no fault with that toilette.'

'Black velvet, diamonds, and point lace?' he suggested. 'That would be just like her, and then it is a costume on which you may spend an indefinite amount of money.'

'How ill-natured you are! It is a charming dress, and she will look lovely in it. I hope you have secured one dance, at any rate, or you will have no chance now.'

He confessed that he had not acted with sufficient spirit in that respect; he had never even thought of asking for a dance.

'Then I am sure she will be very much hurt. She let me see the other day, that she thought a great deal about your coming.'

'If she did, she is not the girl I take her for,' said he, looking rather impatient. It was not Mrs. Mallory's fault if her son remained sceptical on the subject of Helena

Spenceley's *penchant* for him. She had long ago seen that it was useless for her to dangle Helena's hundred thousand pounds before his eyes; he would none of it, whereas to Mrs. Mallory it was an ornament which grew more becoming and more desirable the longer she looked at it. She had discovered, or thought she had discovered, that Sebastian was very anxious not to hurt the feelings of any one, by neglect or unkindness—'that is, of any one but myself,' as she plaintively told herself—and she thought that if she pictured in colours strong enough the affection which she was determined Helena had for him, this sensitiveness of his might lead to the desired results—sooner or later.

'Any other man,' Mrs. Mallory said to herself, 'would have fallen in love with the girl for her beauty alone, if she had not had a penny; but, in that case, of course he would have fallen in love with her.'

Then she tried to excite his self-esteem, and pique his *amour propre*, by telling him that Helena was very difficult to please, and

had already had half a dozen, more or less, eligible offers, all of which she had refused *sans façon.*

'I can quite believe it,' was the tranquil reply. '*Sans façon* exactly describes her manner and her character as well. She has no idea of any medium. Wild enthusiasms and extravagant hatreds——'

('Like me,' murmured Hugo to his plate.)

'And I have no doubt she did refuse the "six braw gentlemen" you mention, uncere-moniously enough.'

Mrs. Mallory would have despaired, if she had not taken comfort in the idea that Sebastian liked to conceal his feelings from her, which argued that perhaps he cherished a secret passion for Helena, and would do as he ought to do, if he were let alone.

Her fears as to the influence of Adrienne Blisset were fitful and intermittent. Sometimes that adventuress did not particularly disturb her mental peace, but at other moments a dread fear seized her lest the game should be going in the very direction

she least wished it to take; lest the obstacle which interfered with her plans and wishes was, not Sebastian's utter and unaccountable indifference to beauty, love, and a hundred thousand pounds, but a misguided, infatuated inclination on his part for a daughter of Heth, with neither beauty (compared with Helena) nor pretensions. When attacked by such thoughts, Mrs. Mallory felt herself turn cold and numb with fear. The idea of Adrienne Blisset promoted to her place, was the most thoroughly unpleasant—not to say altogether hideous—that had ever occurred to her.

On the morning in question, Sebastian, on being asked what his plans were, said he should be in his office all morning, and at a committee meeting in the afternoon. Would he be in to lunch at half-past one? Yes, he fully expected so; and with that he said good-morning, and went away.

The others went their several ways. Hugo retired to the drawing-room, to a packet of new transcendental German music, and to

the spinning out certain music of his own. Mrs. Mallory, after an interview with her housekeeper, ordered her carriage for half-past eleven, wrote letters in the breakfast-room till that time, and then got ready, and drove out in the said carriage. The proverbial 'spectator might have seen' the equipage go from one place to another in the town, and afterwards to certain mansions in the vicinity of the same, where its mistress made state calls. (It was the fashion in Thanshope to make state calls in full dress between twelve and one.) It was quite half-past one when Mrs. Mallory forsook the war-path, and returning home, came into the dining-room. She sat down to lunch without removing her bonnet. She was dressed in her favourite lavender and black, and so attired, with a new and unusual expression of animation and amiability upon her high, fair features, she looked a very handsome, agreeable, though rather thin-lipped English matron.

The gong sounded. First Hugo strolled

in, and raised his dark eyes in some astonishment when the lady graciously and sweetly inquired:

'May I give you some soup, Mr. von Birkenau?'

'No, thank you,' he replied politely but tentatively.

'How warm it is, is it not? So unlike the end of May. May is generally such a bad month in England; don't you think so?'

'You should know best,' said Hugo, bowing solemnly, and somewhat nervous under this excessive amiability.

'I wonder what Sebastian is doing,' she remarked, still graciously. 'He really seems to have his hands quite full.'

At that moment he came in.

'Sorry to be so late, but Sutcliffe kept me. Soup? No, thanks. I'll trouble you for some of that cold fowl, Hugo, please.'

'And will you give me a little sherry, my dear?' said his mother.

Sebastian, too, changed countenance at

this tone, privately wondering 'what next?' but poured out the sherry with imperturbable gravity.

The meal proceeded in silence for some little time, until it occurred to Sebastian to ask:

'Where have you been all morning, mother?'

'Driving,' was the vague reply; and another pause ensued.

Sebastian poured out a glass of sherry, drank some of it, and then thought he would trouble Hugo again; he was so awfully hungry. Hugo, with a gravity amounting to gloom, wrenched the second wing from the fowl before him, and placed it upon Sebastian's plate.

Sebastian was watching the operation with the intense eagerness of a mind quite at ease; and it was at this juncture that Mrs. Mallory said:

'Sebastian, I am sorry to hear of a very strange thing in connection with that girl—what is her name?—whose uncle's affairs you somehow got mixed up with.'

Hugo's eyes gave a flash. That was what was coming!

'Do you mean Miss Adrienne Blisset?' asked Sebastian, in a distinct voice.

'Blisset—yes, Miss Blisset. She professes to take a great interest in the relief affairs.'

'So far as I know, the interest is real—at least if hard work is any test of reality.'

'She appears to choose very strange people as her intimate friends.'

'Myself, *par exemple?*' he suggested.

War was now declared. The blandness had disappeared from Mrs. Mallory's countenance. The excitement remained. Her son did not appear to her to be excited, but Hugo, glancing at him, felt a little thrill as he saw all the slight signs which he so well understood, and which told him that his friend was moved, much moved, unpleasantly moved.

Mrs. Mallory, all unconscious how much Sebastian knew, and reckless of the storm she was inviting to descend upon herself, continued:

'I must say, I hope you are not amongst her intimate friends, unless you wish to be placed on the level of low, immoral, atheistical work-people; the very dregs of the lower orders.'

'It is asserted that Miss Blisset selects her friends from the dregs of the lower orders?' he inquired with ominous politeness.

'The case does not rest on mere assertion. Her uncle professed peculiar opinions, and she carries them to extremes, as is the way with those women who have been brought up amongst men, and always led a vagabond life.'

Sebastian smiled slightly as he carefully balanced a fork upon his little finger.

'*Après?*' he inquired.

'She made the acquaintance of a young man of whose character the less is said the better—picked him up at some reading-room where she used to go in an evening—an *evening*,' said Mrs. Mallory, in an utterly indescribable tone. 'She encouraged him to visit

her, and he did so repeatedly; he is a socialist, an atheist, and altogether immoral. How far the connection may have gone I cannot pretend to say, but this I know, that Frederick Spenceley, who is not exactly straitlaced——'

'No, certainly not.'

'Frederick Spenceley declined to make her acquaintance, and took his sister away, and declined to let her converse with her.'

'You have this information from a reliable source?'

'Perfectly reliable. I am not at liberty to say who told me, but I must say the news exactly agrees with what my own judgment led me to expect. I always said . . .'

'Pardon! No matter what you have always said, or what other people say. I can tell you the truth, not from any second-hand source, but from my own personal knowledge of the circumstances. The young man of whom you have heard such a delightful character was, though he no longer is, one of my

own work-people. He is perfectly respectable, and of unstained character. If Frederick Spenceley were one hundredth part—if he could ever become one hundredth part as much of a gentleman as Myles Heywood naturally is, he might congratulate himself. He—Heywood, I mean—is a friend of Miss Blisset's, and the fact honours both him and her. I have met him at her uncle's house, and I have shaken hands with him in his own house. He is a man whom I honour and respect very much. So much for that part of your information. For the rest, that Frederick Spenceley refused to make Miss Blisset's acquaintance—my dear mother, I am surprised that a woman with your knowledge of the world should believe such a story. I happened to be present then, too. Miss Spenceley wished to introduce her brother to Miss Blisset, and the latter declined the acquaintance; I believe she had excellent reasons for doing so. I pitied Miss Spenceley, from my soul, for she is as superior to her blackguard of a brother as heaven is to

earth. But—I trust you will see the wisdom of making the best of Miss Blisset, and not the worst, for I shall ask her to be my wife—to-day, if I get the chance, and if not, on the very first opportunity.'

Mrs. Mallory had sat, during this prolonged harangue, drawing deep breaths, but at the last announcement, made with an emphasis unusual to Sebastian, it seemed suddenly to burst upon her, how entirely she had overreached herself, and she rose from her chair very pale; and, but that her pride forbade it, would have burst into tears of mortification.

'There is no ingratitude like that of a child to a mother,' said she, in an icy voice. 'You have done all you could to humiliate me and cross my wishes, ever since your return, and now you insult me by seeking out the least——'

They were at the door. He had opened it for her, but as she looked up in uttering those words, she paused, subdued by a certain expression in his eyes and mouth.

'Don't speak too recklessly of that lady. It will do no good, and you would repent it,' he remarked.

She did not finish her sentence, but swept out of the room, and he gently closed the door after her.

He stood in the middle of the room, biting his lip, till Hugo came up to him and took his hand.

'Dear Sebastian, I wish you success, though, *freilich*, I fancied you would marry Miss Spenceley.'

'Why, I wonder?' asked Sebastian, impatiently. 'I cannot imagine why I am supposed to be destined for Miss Spenceley, or she for me. She cannot endure me, and makes no secret of her dislike. . . .'

'You would overcome that,' suggested his counsellor audaciously.

'Could I? She is perfectly charming, I don't wish to deny, but I have loved Adrienne Blisset for years, and I am not going to give her up unless she refuses me.'

'Fellows don't always give up when they are refused,' suggested Hugo again.

'Finish your lunch and hold your tongue. What I was going to say is, that my mother is answerable for a great deal of mischief by persisting in marrying me to Miss Spenceley.'

'If there had been no such person as you, then there would have been no mischief,' said Hugo, apparently throwing in the observation between two sips of claret, for he had obediently returned to the table.

'What do you mean?' asked his friend, stopping in his promenade between the two windows.

'I mean what I say.'

'Why, do you mean that I have ever encouraged——'

'Miss Spenceley? *I, beivahre!* No. But——'

'I shall do you some serious bodily injury if you don't curb your boundless impertinence. Do you mean that I ever encouraged my mother's scheme in any way?'

'Can't say. I've done. Adieu!' said Hugo, going out of the room, and singing in an insultingly loud voice—

'Willst du dein Herz mir schenken,
So fang' es heimlich an!'

CHAPTER XI.

'Opportunity is always golden and beautiful. It is the use it is sometimes put to that is—imperfect.'

SEBASTIAN did not find any opportunity that afternoon for carrying out his purpose. He was fully occupied, so was Adrienne, and he was forced to see her half an hour before he could leave himself, walk away alone in the direction of Blake Street, without having been able to exchange a word with her. This annoyed him, and made him feel nervous and anxious. Three months ago he would, without any inordinate vanity, have felt almost secure of being accepted if he proposed to Adrienne; now he felt very far from sure of

it. The unpleasant scene with Mrs. Mallory left him determined to wait no longer, no more to 'fear his fate too much,' but 'to put it to the touch, and win or lose it all,' that very day, be it early or late.

Accordingly, he returned home after the meeting, dined alone before the usual time, and, knowing that Adrienne was usually at home about half-past seven, set off a little after seven.

His shortest way to Blake Street was to go past the town-hall, and proceed through the pleasure-grounds on the hill-side, through the park at the top, and so across the Town-field into Blake Street.

This he did, and having ascended the hill, entered the park by one of its gates, and found that it was almost deserted. There was a nursemaid and some children playing about the croquet lawn; there was a man reclining upon a bench in a rocky recess—a man who seemed tired, for he was almost crouched together; his face was completely hidden by his arm and hand, which were

stretched on the back of the bench. There was also a woman's figure advancing from the other end of the park, and Sebastian's heart gave a spring as he recognised Adrienne Blisset.

He walked up to her, and met her.

'You here, Mr. Mallory, at this time? That is unusual, isn't it?'

'I am here because I was on my way to your house, hoping very much to find you in. I am glad I have not missed you altogether.'

'I am glad too. I was going to see Mary Heywood, and should most likely have sat with her some time, for my conscience accuses me of having neglected her. But shall we return to my house?'

'Not on any account—that is, if you are not tired and do not object to walking about on this terrace for a short time.'

'Not in the least. What a lovely evening it is! And how clear! Look at those purple moors to the north. I have often longed to get to the top of one of those moors. What do you think I should see at the other side.'

'Yorkshire—and more moors.'

'Those are the moors on the other side of which Charlotte and Emily Brontë lived,' said Adrienne, her thoughts taking any direction but the one Sebastian wished.

'Yes, I believe so. Haworth and Keighley, and all about there. You should go there sometime. But don't look at the prospect now. I want to ask you something.'

'Yes!' said Adrienne, turning to him with a half-smile.

The smile died away. She found his eyes fixed upon hers with an unmistakable meaning in their earnest gaze. Her own face flushed deeply, as he gently took her hand and said:

'I have tried in vain to take an opportunity—at last I have had to make one. I must know something, certainly. I cannot wait any longer. Adrienne, I love you dearly—I have loved you ever since I lost sight of you on that unhappy morning after you left Wetzlar. I knew it then, and my

love has only grown stronger ever since. Can you return it? Will you—sometime—be my wife?'

He felt his happy confidence falling from him on all sides, as he beheld her face, and stood there, cold, as if a warm mantle had dropped from his shoulders.

'You—I am very sorry,' she stammered. 'Oh, Mr. Mallory——'

'Mr. Mallory!' he echoed drearily. 'Adrienne, I see what you are going to say, but think again! I must have been a terrible, conceited fool all this time; but will you not think again? Wait till to-morrow. Don't speak to-day. Let me explain.'

Adrienne's face was full of pain as she said tremulously but decisively,

'No. It would be wrong. I know what I feel, and must always feel, now. I admire you very much; I respect you, oh, more than I can tell you. I have a sort of affection for you. Indeed, I am very fond of you. You were so good to me,' said Adrienne, with tears swimming in her eyes; 'but

I cannot marry you. . . . Oh, do not look like that!' she exclaimed, in an agony, 'I am so sorry; I am so sorry.'

'Are you quite certain?' he asked in a low voice. 'Have I all along been so utterly indifferent to the woman I——'

'Not indifferent. You were never indifferent to me. And once——'

'Once!' he echoed eagerly.

'I thought—I believed——'

'That you could love me—perhaps that you did love me?'

She bowed.

'Ah, that was when I was away. But why should you not love me now, dearest? If you would only let me show you how I love you—you must—you could not help—so good and so loving as you are.'

'No, no! Do not speak to me of it. *It can never be.* I know my own heart now—too well,' she said, looking at him almost appealingly, and with distracted, troubled eyes.

'And there is no love in it for me?'

'Not that kind of love. Oh, heavens! why must I have such things to say to *you!* You must know that you ought to have a very different kind of wife from me. Your wife should be rich and beautiful, and quite different. You will see it yourself some day, when you meet a woman worthy of you, who will love you as you deserve to be loved.'

'That is cold comfort when the woman I worship won't have me. I cannot make you love me.'

'Only because another man has all the love I have to give,' said Adrienne, scarcely audibly, as she turned aside her face.

Sebastian stood still for a moment.

'Forgive me!' said he; 'it is hopeless, I see. I will never speak to you of it again.'

'Forgive *me!*' she said, much moved. 'I ought—no, I could not tell you. I have been distracted . . . I——'

'Do not reproach yourself,' said he, chivalrously. 'I understand. After this' (they had begun to move towards the farther gate of the park, along the broad terrace where

the man was sitting on the seat in the trees)—'after this I have not another word to say. We shall have to meet as before, Adrienne. May I call you Adrienne sometimes?'

'Always, if you like.'

'Will you try to overlook this—to treat me as if I had not annoyed you thus?'

'Annoyed me—*you!* Oh, how can you ask?'

'And then slander will be silenced, and there will be no more misunderstandings. All will be clear between us.'

The tenderness he felt he could not banish from his voice, and hers trembled as she answered:

'Quite clear—as it should be.'

He raised her hand to his lips, and they passed on. The man on the bench had not moved, and they, as they uttered these last words, which were in effect a farewell, saw nothing and no one but each other.

'I must go home. I cannot go on now,' said Adrienne, as they arrived at the gate.

'I will leave you. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' said she, putting her hand in his, but not looking at him. He kept her hand in his so long that at last she looked up

'Dear Sebastian, I——'

'There, that is all I wanted,' said he, with a rather faint smile. 'God keep you, child. Good-bye!'

When Adrienne had left her home, it had been with the firm resolution to see Mary Heywood before returning. But she met Sebastian, and the visit was not accomplished.

CHAPTER XII.

'Great Mother Nature!
Eternal, good, and blessed!
Hear me! Hear my prayer!
Forsake me not in this my need!'

MYLES HEYWOOD'S life had become worse and darker than merely a sad life. It was filled with a wretched pain and unrest, which had been growing like a disease for weeks. His was an earnest, passionate nature, deep and intense; but there was in it a well-spring of contentment, a something essentially sweet and wholesome, which, so long as no very disturbing element intruded, left him tolerably at ease with his life, in spite of the vague dissatisfac-

tion and striving which had led him in earlier days to associate himself with radical working-men's clubs; which had made him eagerly devour all kinds of iconoclastic literature, and which had often sent him home, on pay-day, meditating upon the unequal manner in which wealth was distributed. But he had had nothing to make him feel this inequality, keenly and cruelly, until, with one single circumstance, one single evening's adventure, the turning-point in his life came, and he seemed all at once to realise the significance of all these things: wealth, station, and culture, in the shape of Adrienne Blisset. From that time his view of things was changed. He had seen what he felt to be the best, and most beautiful, and desirable thing in the world; and he did desire it with the ardour of a young man, and a poet, and a lover, all combined, and with an ardour deeper still—the ardour of one who feels that everything great, and high, and satisfactory lies in one direction, and in the other, blackness, emptiness, death, if death be the opposite of life. He could never look

back or down again; and yet, the more he looked forwards and upwards, the more did all he saw in the distance seem unattainable and impossible. He had quite ceased to visit Adrienne. To be with her now was only a prolonged ache and pain. He watched her wistfully, and noted in his heart each day that passed over without a visit from her. She used to come so often; now she never came at all. He knew—every one knew, that her uncle was dead, and that she was his heiress. More than once he had heard it was likely that she and Sebastian Mallory would be married. He felt it to be very likely himself; but to go and see her, to hear such a thing from her own lips, was more than his will had strength to accomplish.

Myles had at one time heartily despised Sebastian Mallory; and later, with little more reason, had as intensely disliked him. Now, that was all changed, and he himself was surprised to find how utterly and entirely his resentment had burnt out, vanished, evaporated. He could see his (as he considered

him) successful rival without any other feeling than one of quiet, despairing indifference. His most active wish, when he was conscious of actively wishing anything, was that all this could somehow come to an end, that some change would soon take place.

The change was approaching, in a manner so unexpected, so utterly terrible and unthought of, that if his sore and weary heart led him somewhat astray, a just and righteously acting world must not blame him too severely. When the eyes are dim with watching, when every nerve is irritable from long strain and a cruel endless tension, when calamity quickly succeeds calamity, it is not given to all men to act exactly as they ought to do.

On the morning of the day on which Mrs. Mallory had been so signally defeated as regarded Miss Blisset, Myles Heywood received a letter. Address and contents were alike in a handwriting unknown to him. The epistle was simply headed, 'Thanshope,' with the date following. He turned it over, and the

subscription puzzled him — 'A Christian Well-wisher,' it was signed. Marvelling at the whole thing, he began at the beginning, and read it through.

'Do you know,' began the 'Christian Well-wisher,' 'what position you are standing in? Do you know to whom you really owe your situation? You owe it to your friend Mr. Sebastian Mallory. Ask him if he did not get Canon Ponsonby's casting-vote, which, with his own, got you in. I thought you were determined to owe nothing to him. Do you know that, with all his fair professions, he is stealing a march upon you in one direction—that if you don't either make sure of a certain young lady, or give her up altogether, you will soon look a great fool? I say this because it is well known that you and she are, or were, great friends. Ask any one you know, almost any one in the town of Thanshope, what is said about you and her, and see if I have not written the truth. There is one way open to you out of this, and one only

—you can leave the place. I take a real interest in you, and advise this, supposing that you do feel some grief at having caused her to be spoken about in such a manner. Of course, you are at liberty either to take my advice or leave it. I should think there cannot be much doubt which is the most manly, not to say Christian, course.

'A CHRISTIAN WELL-WISHER.'

He laid the letter down, feeling that he was trembling—feeling almost as if his limbs failed him. He did not speculate as to who had written the letter. Much of it seemed true to him. Sebastian's love for Adrienne was no delusion of his jealous fancy. Nothing was said against her; he was blamed, and it was hinted that others spoke lightly of her. He was told to test the report, to inquire for himself; the challenge was a fair one.

That he owed his situation to Sebastian Mallory's influence was nothing; such things as that had now lost the slightest power to distress him. That Sebastian was 'stealing a

march' upon him—that idea was so ludicrous and so pitiable as to make him smile dryly in the midst of his own torture. There was no sting in that. If Sebastian chose to woo Adrienne, if she chose to receive his wooing, who should say them nay? He had no such right, at least. He dwelt for a moment on these points, and then came the rush of horror and disgust, the sickening, dreadful part of it. He shook with fury, and with misery too, as he realised that there were people who had watched him and her; that wrong constructions had been put upon their friendship; that people gossiped about her—coupled her name with his. It stung him into madness. There must be something in it. 'Ask,' said the writer, 'ask, and see if I have not written the truth.' To advise him to go away—to appeal to his manly feeling! It was like a hideous dream, which he could not at first grasp. His heart was sore and aching already; this blow seemed to crush him. His nerves had been strained for weeks past; he saw nothing in its proper light or just proportions.

He thrust the letter into his breast-pocket, and, driven by necessity, went out to his work. How he got that work accomplished he could not tell. Adrienne was not there, or he did not think he could have struggled through with it.

At noon he took his way home again. Crossing the Townfield, he met Harry Ashworth, who joined him, wishing him good-day, and observing:

'Myles, lad, you don't look so well. What ails you?'

'Nothing, nothing ails me,' said Myles; and then there flashed a sudden thought into his mind: that letter—that 'Ask, and see if I have not written the truth.' He would put it to the test now; no time like the present.

'I'm telling lies,' said he; 'something does ail me. Harry, are you my friend?'

'Ay, for sure I am, old lad.'

'Then come and prove it. Come with me into our house; I want to show you something.'

They were close at home. Myles led the

way, and Harry followed him into the parlour, the front room, now stripped of almost all the furniture and ornaments which had formerly been the pride of Mary's life.

'See here!' said Myles, his eyes filled with a sombre fire, and his lips twitching a little, as he pulled out the letter; 'read this, and tell me, when you've done, if you know who's meant in it.'

Harry looked surprised, but took the letter and read it. Myles watched him, thinking what a good idea it was to make him read the letter. If the report were unfounded, he would not guess who was referred to; and if it were true, he would. Harry's face changed, grew amazed, embarrassed, as he read on. When he had finished the letter, he folded it up, and returned it, without speaking, to its owner. He did not look at Myles, but out of the window, as he said:

'It's a very queer kind of a letter.'

'Well,' said Myles, obliged to raise his voice, but desirous that neither Mary nor Edmund should overhear the conversation,

'can you give a guess, lad, as to who the lady is that's spoken of?'

'Well,' said Harry, rather confusedly, 'I have heard some talk about you and—and—that lady.'

'Suppose I don't know who is meant? Suppose it's all a riddle to me?' said Myles.

But Harry shook his head, saying:

'Nay, nay, that won't do.'

'But tell me who you think it is,' said Myles impatiently, desperately; 'tell me, for God's sake! I will know, Harry, so out with it.'

'You must remember, it's no tale of mine—it's only what I've heard; and I believe the lady meant is Miss Blisset. Fact is,' he added decisively, 'I know it is!'

Again Myles's lips quivered a little, as he said:

'You said you were my friend, Harry. You must tell me what you've heard.'

'Well, it's useless to deny that there's a story going about that before her uncle died she was in love with you, and that you said

so often; but *I* don't believe it, old chap. You never think I believe it all?'

'That I said she was in love with me?' said Myles, in a voice that had grown almost hoarse.

'Yes; and that when you went to their house it wasn't exactly to see the old gentleman, but——'

'There, that will do!' said the other, holding up his hand and turning away sickened. It was too hideous. If any such rumour had penetrated to her ears? He could not speak, till Harry in an ill-judged moment said:

'Nay, there's nothing to take on about so much, Myles. Some enemy of yours has written that letter—some one as wants you out of the way. Can't you see what he's driving at when he advises you to go? Likely enough some one as thinks he might get your place if you were gone. But you're not the sort of chap to pay any attention——'

'The advice is good,' said Myles curtly. 'Very likely I shall take it. Do you know

who set this tale going ?' he asked, turning to Harry with a look which startled the latter.

'That's just what no one can tell,' said he. 'It seems to be known everywhere, and yet we can't tell where it comes from.'

'Though you give it the benefit of free discussion. Well, I've found out what I wanted to know. There's only one thing more—if you care for me or mine—and we've known each other a good many years now—you'll never speak of what we have spoken of this morning.'

'My hand upon it,' said his friend. 'Never, so long as I live.'

They left the room. Harry departed by the back way to have a word with Mary, and to offer to come and sit up that night with Edmund, who was much worse. The offer was accepted, and Harry went away.

The midday meal was again a very sad one. Myles ate nothing, and said nothing; and Mary, full of fears and forebodings, was almost as bad.

After dinner the young man went out

again—up the street he hated, to the room which had become a purgatory to him. How he loathed the sight of that long building with the many windows and the well-known faces! It seemed to him as if every eye must be fixed upon him, every finger pointing at him.

Work was not over until late that afternoon. It was six o'clock, or after, when Myles got home again, and, on going into the house, found that Mary was sitting upstairs with Edmund; so, after brooding a little, his mind full of wild, half-chaotic projects and ideas, he left the house and wandered out, he knew not whither. At last he found himself in the park, pacing about the broad terrace, and looking, with eyes that saw nothing, across the idle town and the nearer hills, to the blue, calm moorland ridges far away to the north. It was a scene he had loved, half unconsciously, from his childhood up, but to-day it was without joy—almost without existence for him.

At last he seated himself on a bench

situated in a kind of rockery which ran along one side of the terrace; the seat was a little retired in a hollow of the rockwork, and there he remained, and gradually he turned his back upon the prospect and his face to the wall, and hid his face in his arm and fought alone, as well as he could, with the misery and despair which rushed over him like a flood. He saw no point of cheerfulness or light in all his life's sky. All was black and thick and overcast.

'This is no fit place for me to stay in,' he thought. 'I must get away as soon as I can. If I go, all the lies will die out quickly enough, and then—there's another man who is ready to fight her battles for her, and he may see her as much as he pleases, and there's no harm in it.'

How long he had remained there motionless and miserable he did not know. He had forgotten all outside things, and was busied solely with his wretched self-introspection. At last, however, distant voices first, and then approaching footsteps, which advanced slowly

and with many pauses, penetrated to his abstracted ear. He did not move; why should any one notice him, or think of him? Still less did he move when he distinctly heard and recognised Sebastian Mallory's voice close to him saying:

'And then slander will be silenced, and there will be no more misunderstandings. All will be clear between us.'

His voice was deep with love as he spoke, and to each vibration of it Myles's heart seemed to give an answering throb.

'Quite clear, as it should be,' replied the voice he loved best, and it trembled too.

They paced past. Myles hid his face more deeply in his folded arms. He heard Sebastian kiss her hand, and then their voices died away—their footsteps too, and at last Myles raised his head and changed his position. He was half puzzled at the change which had come over him, at the quiet apathy which seemed to fill his whole soul. He had heard those words spoken which he had thought would be harder than any other

words for him to bear, and yet he found himself sitting on in the same place, his pulses beating no faster, his breath coming no more quickly. Such utter indifference he felt to be ominous, and yet, though he tried, he could bring no different feelings forward; he repeated to himself all that he thought he had lost, all he believed Sebastian had won; conned it over as a devotee might tell his beads, but it had no effect. He felt no special pain or indignation.

And yet, when he rose with the instinctive intention of turning his steps homewards, he found that he was incapable of going home. He recoiled from the very idea of entering the house, or speaking to any one he knew. He stood reasoning within himself about it.

'Why shouldn't I go home? Home is surely the best place. Molly is there, and Ned. I ought to go and stay with him; he's so ill.' And he forced his feet towards home. But it was useless; he felt it impossible to enter the house.

'I know what I want,' he reasoned within

himself. 'I want a good stretch of a walk, right over the moors, and away from this smoky hole. There's nothing like a moorland breeze for blowing away unhealthy fancies. Harry used to say so, and he's tried it often enough, and in trouble enough, poor lad.'

He smiled. He found himself pitying Harry Ashworth with an intensity of commiseration such as he could not by any means wring out for his own sorrows.

But he congratulated himself. A long, long walk, a walk of twenty miles or so, to prove to himself that he was still young and strong, and swift of foot, and that six weeks' clerkship drudgery, and six months' alternate hot and cold, hope and fear, doubt and despair, had not impaired one iota his strength and endurance! That glorious moorland air, blowing keen and fresh, though it was pure, from the north, over the top of Blackrigg! There was surely not a grief, not a solitude-nourished fear and sorrow, that its strong, bracing breath would not blow clean away!

By this time he had left the park, and was walking quickly down the street in a northerly direction. He met one or two friends and acquaintances before he got fairly out of the town; he returned their salutations quite mechanically and still walked on. Just outside Thanshope, as the suburb of Bridgefold began, there stood a well-known public-house, the Craven Heifer; and, as he was passing its door, some one hailed him.

'Eh, Myles! I say, Myles, is yon you?'

He looked up, and saw a man standing in the doorway—a man whom he had known years ago, who had once worked side by side with him in the factory, and had left and gone over into Rossendale before Myles had been promoted from the weaving-shed to the warehouse. He stared blankly at the man, who had been drinking, and, though by no means drunk, was decidedly elevated.

'Come in, mon!' he cried. 'It's years sin' I saw you. Come in, and have a glass, for old acquaintance' sake. I'll stand it.'

He would not be gainsaid, but rolled out,

and pulled his former friend into the taproom. There were half-a-dozen men there, all more or less happy and free from care, as it seemed to Myles. They welcomed him noisily, and his friend asked him, with unnecessary affectionateness of tone and manner, what it should be.

'What? Oh, anything. What you are having yourself,' said Myles, greeting first one and then another of them, and thinking, with a kind of savage mirth, within himself that there were more kinds of pleasure in the world than one; since he could not have one kind, he might as well try another. He would see whether these men, who seemed so pleased to see him, were really such bad company after all. And he sat down, and waited, until a girl brought him a glass of steaming hot punch—whisky punch; that was what they were drinking.

'Now, then,' cried his acquaintance, 'good luck to you, Myles! Here's to our next merry meeting, eh?'

'To our next!' said Myles, raising the glass

to his lips; and then, even as it touched them, feeling as if he had suddenly come to his senses, he put the glass down on the table. 'Not yet!' he said, half aloud, and got up from his seat, and walked out of the room, shaking off the hands that were outstretched to stay him, and unheeding the loud and angry expostulations which came after him.

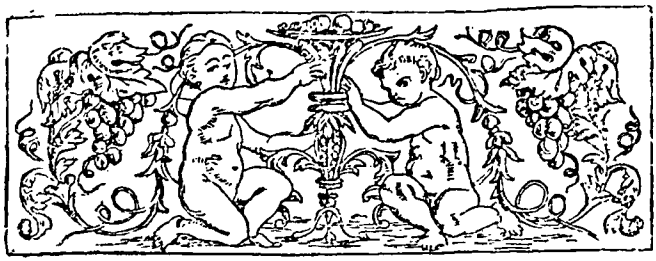
'Pah!' he exclaimed, as he took his way along the road again, 'I'm not come to that yet!'

It was a long and toilsome road that led from the town of Thanshope, through some outlying suburbs, to a large manufacturing village, called Hamerton, which lay on the very skirts of Yorkshire, closed in on all sides by the great ridges of Blackrigg, and some neighbouring wild and desolate moors. He took the road along which Hugo and Sebastian had once driven, and the sun had set as he turned his face towards the hills with that strange sensation of oppressive apathy and indifference ever at his heart. The night was

descending; the 'stars rushed out,' as he at length gained the complete solitude of the moors, and, turning aside from the road, plunged half knee-deep into the thick heather and ling, which was the only vegetation about there. He walked, for a very short time as it seemed to him—really, for hours—battling with the horrible sensations of a great, black, yawning, hideous blank, a huge emptiness, an *ewiges Nichts*, which completely overpowered him. He was unconscious how far he had gone, or where he was, or that he was even weary, when suddenly he found himself stumbling over the knolls of heather, and looking up, found that it was dark. The summer night had closed in, and he, for aught he knew, might be twenty miles away, or thirty, from Thanshope.

He thought he would sit down and rest a little, so he sank down upon the friendly heather, and found that it formed a soft and yielding bed, and that the air which played around his head and face was cool, and pure, and sweet. For a moment, he found a blessed

sensation of rest and relief, and then all things seemed softly to swim and fade around him; with sweeping wing sleep came upon him, and laid her finger upon his eyelids, and bade the weary brain rest. He sank gradually down in the hollow of the heather, and a deep, dreamless slumber overcame him, and saved him. Never had sleep been a more beneficent visitant; never had kindly Nature taken to her soft arms a more weary, heartsick child of hers, than she did that summer night, when she offered to Myles Heywood rest upon her own broad bosom.



CHAPTER XIII.

SUNRISE.

MARY HEYWOOD, all the weary afternoon of that weary day, sat beside Edmund's bed and nursed him, with fear at her heart that the nursing would be of no long duration. The fever which had consumed him was over, but the weakness which remained was terrible—it was a weakness from which, as Mary dimly felt, there would never be any rallying. She had brought sewing and knitting upstairs into the little bedroom, and she drew down the blind 'to keep the sun out,' as they both said. Edmund lay perfectly still. She asked him if she should read to him, but he smiled a little,

and shook his head. Neither of them knew how very near the end was. Edmund, if he could have known, would have been very glad, and Mary would have been so miserable, that it was well she did not know.

'I could like to see Myles a bit,' said Edmund at last; 'I ne'er see him now, hardly. He's quite different from what he was.'

'He's not happy,' said Mary. 'I don't rightly know what ails him, but it's summat very bad, I'm sure.'

'Oh, he doesn't like bein' out o' work. No more should I, if I was him. He's ne'er been used to such pinchin' work as this. They keep him a long time at yon shop.'

'Ay, they do. Harry Ashworth said he'd come and sit wi' thee to-neet, Ned. Would thou like it?'

Edmund assented, with a look of pleasure, and there was silence, while the afternoon wore on, and at last Mary's head began to droop. She was weary with sorrow, with working, and with watching. The atmosphere of the room was close and heavy,

although Mary had conscientiously tried to follow out the doctor's directions about keeping it ventilated. She could not keep her eyes open, but slept in her chair until Edmund's feeble touch on her arm awoke her, and she started up.

'Eh, what is it, lad ?'

'I could so like summat to drink, Molly,' said he gaspingly. 'And I think there's summat not reet wi' Myles. I heard him come in, and sit quite still for a bit, and now he's gone out again, without comin' up here, or waitin' for his tea, or anything.'

Thoroughly awake, Mary hurried downstairs, and found emptiness and solitude. She could see that Myles had been in. She could see the chair that he had drawn up to the table and pushed away again, and she wondered and was uneasy at his going out thus, without word or message.

The kitchen, too, felt close. She threw up the window, and set the back door open to let some air in. Then she roused the fire, and set the gently-singing kettle upon it, and

brought out the tea-things. She prepared some tea for Edmund, and took it upstairs to him. He had said he was very thirsty, and he took the cup eagerly, and put his lips to it, then put it down again.

'I feel very faint, Mary; I can't take that. I mun have a little—bran——'

He had fainted, and it was some time before she succeeded in restoring him to consciousness.

'Eh, I wish Miles was here; I wish Harry would come,' she kept murmuring to herself, looking with anguish upon the poor worn face, which had now the stamp of the approaching end set upon it in unmistakable characters.

At last a knock at the outer door informed her that Harry Ashworth had come. She ran downstairs, and let him in, drawing him into the kitchen; and when they were there, sat down upon her rocking-chair, and began to cry heartily.

'Why, Mary, what ails thee, lass?' said Harry, taking her hand.

'Myles is gone out—I don't know where, and yon poor lad upstairs hasn't so much longer to be here,' said Mary, looking at him with her tearful eyes. 'Thou munnot leave me yet awhile, Harry.'

Whether the presence of a great mutual sorrow broke the barrier which had hitherto existed between these two, I know not. As Mary begged him not to leave her, their eyes met, and something in those eyes gave Harry the courage he had never before been able to summon to his aid. It was as if by a mutual impulse that they bent towards each other, and their lips met for consolation and reassurance; and Harry, with a wonderful sense of strength and courage, put his arm round Mary's waist, saying:

'There's nought I'd like so well as never to leave thee at all, Mary, if thou could look at such a poor, deaf, marred chap as me. Sometimes I think thou could, and sometimes I'm sure thou couldn't. Dost think thou could make up thy mind to take me?'

'I made up my mind long ago, what I'd

do if ever thou asked me,' said Mary, naïvely.

'And what was that?'

'Why, to take thee, for sure,' she answered.

Harry, smiling, looking on her with amaze and admiration, ventured on another kiss, and said:

'Eh, but I have been a fool not to speak to thee before.'

She smiled a little, and then, the remembrance of the troubled present returning to her, said:

'I'm very happy, but we mun think o' poor Ned, just now. Thee go upstairs, and tell him what thou's done. He always *were* suspicious about thee. It'll cheer him up like, and I'll come after thee in a minute or two.'

Just for a few moments the news had the desired effect upon Edmund. He shook hands with Harry, smiled, and looked what he had not voice enough to say. But the same chill look of coming death was upon his face; and Mary, as Myles still did not come, could not rest until she had been out and

brought the doctor back with her. The doctor was a busy man. He made a very brief visit—said nothing much in the sick-room, but ordered some restorative, and, when Mary followed him downstairs and tremulously asked his opinion, said brusquely, but not at all unkindly,

'My good girl, you must make up your mind to lose him. I cannot even assure you that he will live till morning.'

Restraining her tears Mary went upstairs again, and, with Harry, resumed her watch by the sick lad. They were slow and solemn hours. They saw the end approaching under their very eyes; they saw Death's grey seal stamping its impress more and more visibly upon the features, and, one on either side the narrow little bed they sat, while it grew deep night, and still Myles did not come home.

'What can be keeping him?' the girl uneasily wondered again and again; but she dared not speak her wonder, for every time that Edmund roused from the lethargy which was settling more and more heavily upon him,

he looked round with an anxious gaze, and a vague astonishment at the absence of that brother who had been his stay and protection all his weak and painful life.

Midnight passed, and still the sorrowful watch lasted. One o'clock struck, and still he came not; and still the face on the pillow grew greyer and more deathlike. Two o'clock passed, and yet all was as it had been Towards half-past two, Mary, going softly to the window, raised a corner of the blind, and beheld the first flush of dawn in the east, as it may be seen at that hour on a June morning. Her heavy eyes looked across the houses, across the town, to where the pure sky, with a cool, bright light, showed the ridges of the moors. She looked back into the room. Harry's eyes had followed her, and hung upon her face; and Edmund's eyes too were opened, wide, bright and clear. His voice had regained a last flicker of strength, as he said distinctly,

'Wind up the blind, Molly, and open the window a bit. Let *me* see the sun rise.'

Speechless, Mary complied. A waft of pure, fresh morning air was borne into the room through the open window. Then there was a pause. From where he lay, Edmund could see the broadening rose-flush in the east, and then suddenly the chimes from the spire rang out; three was solemnly tolled, and in a moment there rang out upon the sleeping town, resting from its troubles, the sweet old tune, 'Life let us cherish!' Mary heard the tune, 'Myles' tune,' as she called it, and wondered longingly where he was. She returned to the bedside, and Harry went to the window. Edmund had closed his eyes again, and another quarter had chimed, when Harry exclaimed:

'He's there! He's coming!'

In a few moments more, Myles stood in the room. There were very few words more. They all stood round the bed, and Edmund held his brother's hand. In the watching him, the others had no time to notice the haggard look on Myles' face. Day grew broader, and life waned. Four was chiming

melodiously ; the first stir of life was audible, as Edmund quietly breathed his last.

Mary was sobbing—the sunrise was over—and day, full, glowing and brilliant, poured in upon the dead face.

CHAPTER XIV.

DUST AND ASHES.

THE day that followed was naturally a sad one. Mary was too much occupied in mourning her loss to notice Myles as she otherwise might have done. Harry left the house about five o'clock, promising to call again about dinner-time. A friendly neighbour came in, and helped Mary to perform all that remained to be done for the dead. At last all was finished. The woman had gone, and Mary paused as she left the room, looking round it with a kind of sorrowful pride. It looked very white, and pure, and still.

She had drawn the blind down and set

everything in the most exquisite order. The dead figure lay stretched out in its eternal repose, with calm, beautiful face, and quietly closed eyes. At the door she returned, and ran up to the bedside, and kissed the cold forehead.

'Poor lad! poor lad!' she whispered between her tears, 'thine has been a hard life, but thou'rt in heaven now, if ever onybody was.'

When Myles came in, during the forenoon, she was struck, for the first time, with his great stillness and the strange, haggard look upon his face. She remembered that he had been out all night, and asked him what he had been doing.

'I dare say it seemed unkind,' he replied, 'but you may trust me, Molly, I couldn't help it. I can't explain to you why it was. Something had happened. I couldn't help it.

He sat down beside her, and took her hand, and they both remained there, looking mournfully into the little fire; she with the sorrow of deep affection which knows

its object removed; he sad too, but with a more incurable sadness than hers. They were both oppressed with sorrow, but he

> 'Beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelmed in deeper gulfs than she.'

On this scene entered Harry Ashworth, with offers of his services, if they were wanted, and also with the object of telling Myles what had passed between him and Mary.

Myles heard it all out, down to Mary's acknowledgment that she wished to marry Harry, 'supposing thou hast nothing against it, Myles.'

'Against it? What could I have against it? You've my hearty consent and good wishes, both of you. There won't be a better wife in Thanshope, nor in England, than you'll get, Harry; and I know you so well that I'm not afraid to trust Molly to you. I'm glad it is so, for I don't think I shall stay here long, and I should have been unhappy to leave her alone. I hope you'll both be as happy as you deserve.'

He shook hands with Harry and kissed Mary, but he could not force a smile. They saw that he was glad, relieved to find that they had decided to be married, but they also saw that he had some sorrow behind it all, which was greater than the joy.

* * * *

It was a little after eight on the same evening. Myles found himself standing opposite the Townhall, with his hand on the latch of the Oakenrod gate. He paused a moment before lifting it, then, summoning up courage, did so, and stood within the garden of the house against which he had had so long and so strong a prejudice.

He had never been so near it before. His feet were strange within the gates of rich or important people of any kind, but particularly here. It was with a sort of thrill that he looked round at the smoothly shaven grass, the dazzling flower beds, in all the splendour of their June garments, the softly rolled gravel beneath his feet. The errand he came upon was one which, a month ago, he would

have repudiated, would have said that no imaginable combination of circumstances could make him undertake it. Yes, truly; but the combinations of circumstances which force us into the actions that humble us, and wound us, and sting our self-esteem with hornet-stings, are always such combinations as we should never imagine beforehand, because it never occurs to us that deserving persons, such as ourselves, can be put into positions only appropriate to ill-regulated conduct.

Myles was conscious of no bad conduct or evil intentions, but only of a great, ever-growing misery, which was so strong as to force him to try in some way to escape from it, and this was the only path which presented itself as practicable; so he took it, as is generally the case.

He walked up to the front door, past the open windows with the lace curtains fluttering inside, and pulled the bell. An unpleasant fear seized him, lest Sebastian should be out, gone to see Adrienne perhaps, and he would have his hard task to do all over again.

A page-boy opened the door, and Myles inquired if Mr. Mallory were at home.

'I believe so,' said the youth, a little wondering at the unusual visitor.

'I wish to see him,' said Myles, stepping in, 'if he is not engaged, that is; and my business is rather particular.'

The boy, after serious consideration, decided to show the visitor into the library, and ask him to take a seat. This he did, and inquired,

'Who shall I say wishes to see him?'

'Tell him that Myles Heywood would be glad to speak to him, if he is disengaged.'

The page disappeared. Myles was left alone in the library, and his quick, restless eyes roamed round it, and took everything in, and the full significance of everything—the soft carpets; the harmonious, subdued hues of walls, hangings, and furniture; the relief afforded by gleams of gold here and there; the book-cases filled with books of all times and in all languages; the great bronze busts of Aristotle and Sophocles; the quaint

blue-and-white vases; the two curious paintings by Sebastian's favourite German artist; the reading-stands; the writing-tables; the pleasant luxury, and taste, and abundance of every appointment.

'No wonder!' said he to himself. 'And between the man and me—his manners and mine, his mind and mine—there is just the same difference as there is between this library of his, and our little flagged kitchen at home. This is the place for her, and I feel as if I could see her here sitting at that writing-table, or standing in the window there, looking out.'

He heaved a deep sigh, and at that moment some one began to play a melody, on a piano in another room; a soft, sad, melancholy air, to which he listened so intently that he did not hear the door open, and was first roused by Sebastian's voice.

'Good evening. I am sorry to have kept you waiting; but I was engaged, and could not escape.'

'Don't mention it,' said Myles, rising, and

as each man's eyes fell upon the other man's face, both felt surprise. Sebastian almost showed his, in a suppressed exclamation, but Myles was too sad and oppressed to experience more than a vague wonder and astonishment that a man in what he thought was Sebastian's position, should wear that subdued, grave, downcast look.

'I noticed that you were not in your place to-day,' began Mallory, by way of opening the conversation; 'nothing wrong at home, I hope?'

'Yes; we are in trouble at home. My brother, who has been ill for a long time, died this morning, early.'

'I am very sorry, indeed. Of course you would not think of coming to work, at present. It is not——'

'It was not to excuse myself from work that I came,' said Myles, in the same quiet, constrained way. 'My brother's death is a grief to me, of course; but one does not talk about such things. I was going to trouble you on a matter of business, if you can spare the time——'

'Perfectly well. In what can I help you?'

Myles bit his lips. He had strong ideas about what it was fitting for a man to say and do under certain circumstances. Probably, if he had formulated some of his ideas upon ethics, most sophisticated persons would have broken into inextinguishable laughter. One favourite maxim of his was that, to use his own language, 'To blackguard a man, high and low, and then go and ask a favour of him, was a mean, dirty trick; fit for a hound, perhaps but not for an honest man.' If he could not be said to have 'blackguarded' Sebastian high and low, he had certainly spoken with less than courtesy, both of him and to him; it was impossible to ignore that fact, and proceed to his real errand.

'You may think it a very strange thing, but I've come to ask a favour of you,' said he.

'Is it strange? I shall be glad to grant it if I can.'

Myles lifted his hand a moment, and then went on:

'You may not know that I have often

spoken very bitterly of you, but you do know that I have not been particularly civil to you —have I?'

'Well, not exactly effusive,' admitted Sebastian, with a slight smile, wondering whether he had at last completed his much-desired conquest.

'It is true,' said Myles. 'I had a bad opinion of you—a prejudice against you—and I expressed it. If it had not been for troubles I have had lately,' he added, with that little nervous twitch of the lips which had only lately been present with him; 'but for those troubles, I might have gone on thinking and speaking evil of you without a cause. But my eyes have been opened. I see how utterly wrong I was—blind and bigoted. You have proved yourself a very different man from what I thought you—a very much wiser and better man than I should have been in your place—and I beg your pardon for what I have said against you.'

'But, my dear fellow, you must not take

it so terribly in earnest; so—so tragically. Everyone has his prejudices; I have some most preposterous ones, I believe. All the same, I confess to you that I was excessively piqued by your bad opinion of me. It has been a matter of some moment, with me, to overcome that prejudice, and enlist you amongst my friends. If I can say that you are amongst them now, I must feel that I have won a kind of victory.'

'Mr. Mallory, I can never be amongst your enemies, never again. Let that be enough. I can say no more. You are wiser and more generous, too, than I am; but you can afford to be so. The reason I came to-night, was to ask you if you still remember an offer you made me a short time ago—the offer to give me a place away from Thanshope, and *out of England*, you said?'

'I remember it perfectly well, and that I said I could still do it if you changed your mind about it—well?'

'I have changed my mind about it. If you can carry your generosity a little further, and

get me that place, or something like it—the further away from here the better—I shall be—God knows how grateful to you : I can never express it.'

'I can still do it,' said Sebastian, looking attentively and kindly at the eager, haggard face of the other. 'But I am sorry you think of leaving Thanshope.'

'I *must* leave Thanshope. It is to get away from here that I ask. Will the work be hard? I hope so. I care for nothing but hard work—hard work,' he repeated, in a sort of restless, prolonged sigh.

'You will have what you wish for. The work is certainly pretty stiff. It is in Germany—in a rough, mining district near a large town. There is a cotton-factory, and some colleries. They have a lot of English and Irish workpeople there. The master and owner, Herr Süsmeyer, is a very intimate friend of mine. He wants a sort of superintendent—an Englishman, and one who is not afraid of work. He himself is as much an Englishman as a German. Still you must

know a little of the language. Did you not learn something of it from Miss Blisset?' he added deliberately.

'Yes,' said Myles, curtly.

'Ah, you will soon pick up more; you are quick, and you must study when work is over. That will give you as much occupation as even you could wish, I think. I shall give you a very high recommendation, indeed, as being personally known to me.'

'And as having been always polite, reasonable and amiable with my superiors; not ready to take offence, and willing to own myself in the wrong,' suggested Myles, with grim humour.

Sebastian smiled, in silence, as he drew a paper-case and inkstand towards him, and wrote rapidly. He fastened up the letter, and addressed it to—

HERRN GUSTAV SÜSMEYER,
Eisendorf,
Westphalien,
Prussia,

and handed it to Myles, saying:

'I know the situation is still open, and that letter will secure it for you. I shall also write to Herr Süsmeyer to-night, so as to lose no time. From what you say, I suppose you will want to go soon?'

'As soon as ever I can,—in a few days, when poor Ned is buried, and I can leave Mary.'

'You will leave your sister behind you?'

'For a good reason,' said Myles. 'She's going to be married, and I know I leave her in good hands.'

'May I ask whom she will marry?'

'Harry Ashworth, a friend of ours. He has loved her long,' said Myles, not even feeling surprised that he should be relating such things to Sebastian.

'I am very glad; I wish them all happiness. I am sure the man is fortunate, who marries your sister.'

'Yes, he is,' assented Myles. 'Then,' he added, 'you think I may go any day.'

'Any day; but before you go, I hope you will see me again, so that I can give you

some idea of the place, and tell you what route to take. It is an out-of-the-way sort of place; and, excuse me, the journey is somewhat expensive, and——'

'You are very kind. My friend Harry has money which he will lend me. I shall soon repay him if I once got work. He won't want it till he is married. Let me see: the day after to-morrow—Mary will stay with Harry's mother. Would it be convenient if I called the day after to-morrow, in the evening?'

'The day after to-morrow—to-morrow is Mrs. Spenceley's ball,' said Sebastian, half to himself. 'Yes; the day after to-morrow will suit me perfectly well.'

'And the day after that I can go,' exclaimed Myles, the first ray of anything like pleasure flashing across his face. 'I can go;' he repeated.

Sebastian looked at him, not feeling at all satisfied with his victory. All that he had ever wished to himself, with regard to Myles, had come to pass. The latter had owned him-

self wrong; had apologised for his own frowardness; had descended so far as to ask a favour; and to express himself in tones of unmistakable emotion as deeply grateful when it was granted. And yet—the effect was not in the least what it ought to have been. The sensations of the victor were anything but jubilant.

'You seem very anxious to get away?' he remarked, involuntarily and inquiringly.

'Yes, I am; it's the only thing I care for, just at present,' said Myles. 'Good-night!' he added rising. 'I can't express my gratitude to you. You would have been justified in treating me very differently.'

'Indeed I should not!' exclaimed Sebastian; and the sense that his victory was a barren one was borne still more strongly in upon him.

What was it worth if, after all, it had only been won *for* him by Myles' adverse circumstances, not *by* him,' through his own influence over the conquered one.

'Heywood,' he exclaimed earnestly, 'is

there nothing behind all this that you could tell me? Can I do nothing for you but help you to get away from this place, which seems to have grown so unbearable to you? I do not ask from ordinary curiosity—you must know that; it is from sympathy, and a sincere wish to be your friend, if possible.'

Myles shook his head.

'I can speak to no man of what troubles me, thank you,' said he. 'All the same, I am not ungrateful.'

He held out his hand, which the other grasped heartily, and in another minute found himself alone.

All that evening, all the night, he was haunted by a vision of the pale face and miserable eyes of Myles Heywood—a vision of suffering whose very remembrance oppressed him.

CHAPTER XV.

HUGO.

THE few days intervening between her dispute with her son and the Spenceleys' ball were, as may be supposed, not particularly pleasant ones to Mrs. Mallory. Sebastian, after his interview with Adrienne, came home, and, looking into the drawing-room, found his mother alone. She did not deign to notice him, but he, coming in, said to her:

'Mother, I want to speak to you.'

'Well?'

'I proposed to Miss Blisset this evening.'

'Indeed!'

'You do not ask what reception my offer met with.'

'I imagine, considering your relative positions, there cannot be much need to inquire.'

'Still, I may as well tell you that she refused me.'

Mrs. Mallory was profoundly astonished, of course; but as, after a moment's reflection, she did not perceive herself any nearer her real and cherished object, Sebastian's marriage with Helena, she contented herself with uttering a sneering little laugh, and saying, in an exasperating tone,

'Really!'

'So that you will not have the annoyance of knowing her your daughter-in-law. But I think it better to mention that such remarks as you made about her this morning must not be repeated in my presence. I do not choose to hear anything spoken of that young lady which is not quite respectful.'

'Though she *has* jilted you,' said Mrs. Mallory, with an amiable smile.

'I was not aware of it.'

'Very likely not; men seldom do know when women make fools of them. The better for them and their conviction as to their superior wisdom.'

'You may possibly be right,' he rejoined, with perfect temper; 'but the point I wish to impress upon you is, that nothing disrespectful is ever to be uttered of Miss Blisset in my presence. The other questions are quite supplementary.'

She made no answer, and Sebastian, politely wishing her good-night, retired to his study.

Mrs. Mallory sat alone, very angry, after her phlegmatic, batrachian fashion, at what had happened, and longing very much, for the relief of her own feelings, to punish some one in some way. It was too exasperating that Sebastian should behave in that manner, after all her plans for his good and welfare. Helena Spenceley was at the moment perfection in her eyes.

'At any rate, he must go to the ball the day after to-morrow,' she said to herself. 'It is a good chance. There is no time when a

man is so likely to fall in love with a woman as when he has just been "refused" by another woman.'

But here her thoughts wandered off to Adrienne, and she felt as angry with her for her presumption in refusing Sebastian, as she would have felt with her success, had she accepted him. Indeed, her audacity in attracting him at all was thoroughly odious; she was a little dog in the manger, who would neither accept the man's love herself, nor leave him free to wander aside to where beauty and a hundred thousand pounds waited for him to lift his hand in order to utter a rapturous 'Yes.'

'For Helena *is* in love with him, let her pretend what she likes,' she muttered angrily, 'I can see it distinctly. He might have her for the asking. . . . I wonder if all children are born to break their mother's hearts.'

With which speculation agitating her brain she retired to rest.

Her spirit was still ruffled and ill at ease all the next day, and by degrees she concentrated

her ill-temper upon a single object—a sort of focus to her anger and vexation—and that object was no other than Hugo von Birkenau. She had always regarded him with little favour: he was poor, dependent, and behaved himself as if he were rich and free. Now, everything that he said or did appeared an offence—a purposely intended, premeditated insult, directed at herself, with the purpose of angering her: a very strange frame of mind, dear reader, and one which, from its being so utterly unknown to you and me and eminently reasonable persons like ourselves, would almost seem to require some elucidation or description.

Mrs. Mallory found the day go over, and Hugo continue to be insultingly cheerful and conversational, without her being able to find any actual ground for quarrelling with him. It would come, she was determined; it should come: he was too impertinent to be tolerated without an attempt to repress him.

On the evening on which Myles came to see Sebastian, the latter and Hugo were

sitting together in Sebastian's study. Hugo had heard of Adrienne's refusal, and though condoling, did not feel so sorry as he considered he ought to have done. By degrees the conversation drifted off to Hugo's own affairs and prospects. Sebastian told him he thought he ought seriously to think about what he meant to do.

'I have thought about it, and decided,' said Hugo. 'I'm going to write an opera. That has been my ambition ever since I could strum upon a piano.'

'But, my dear lad, you will never learn all that you must know in order to write an opera, by staying in Thanshope. You must go away, Hugo, to your native land, where alone true music flourishes, and you must study. You ought to go to Cöln, or Leipzig, or some other conservatorium. I should recommend Leipzig.'

'I have always thought of Leipzig,' answered the boy, 'and I will go as soon as you like, Sebastian, but it will be very dreary without you.'

'Oh, bah! Yours is a fickle, artist nature, Hugo, revelling in the delight of the moment. You will think Leipzig heaven a week after you get there, and all the other pupils in the conservatorium seraphs and angels, and you will wonder how you ever lived here.'

'Not fickle, Sebastian!' he cried, with the tragic earnest, which sometimes made Sebastian think him so like Helena Spenceley. 'Anything but that! Anything but fickle to you! If I thought I ever *could* be fickle to you, I'd put an end to myself to-night, and have no qualms of conscience about it. Such a wretch would be better out of the world than in it.'

'Oh, nonsense! But one thing I do wish you would promise me. I've often thought of asking you before, but I was afraid it might seem like trying to entrap your youth and innocence.'

'What is it? Quick! Tell me what it is!' asked Hugo, his eyes a-blaze with eagerness.

'Well, it is this: that you will never, before you are one-and-twenty, take any very

important step, without *telling* me what you intend to do. I don't say asking my permission. I trust too much in your honour and purity of heart to keep you from doing anything bad,' he added, with a smile. 'I would not harass and fetter you by any such stupid restriction; but as I trust you, I want you to trust me. Don't do anything important without telling me that you intend to do it, and giving me a chance to offer you a specimen of my superior wisdom, you know.'

'What a question! I swear it!' said Hugo, enthusiastically. 'As if I *could* do anything without consulting you!'

'Not so fast!' said his friend, laughing. 'Wait till the time comes. I shall most likely seem then a wearisome old formalist, who——'

'*Never!*'

'But I tell you, it will be so, you obstinate young dog! There are temptations, Hugo, and you, with your temperament, will find them as hard to resist as if they were red-hot fiery hail. I am such a slow, phlegmatic sort

of fellow. They don't affect me in the same way. My temptations always come too late. By the time I begin to think I should like to do something either bad or idiotic, the chance is over, and I am saved. So I have got the reputation of being a very well-conducted sort of person, and not caring for the things other fellows care about.'

'At any rate, I solemnly give the promise you ask, and should have done so if it had been ten times as binding—and there's my hand upon it,' said Hugo, to whom the idea of binding himself to any particular thing, by 'solemn oaths and execrations,' was especially fascinating and delightful. It seemed to surround him and his friend with a little romance, and to separate them from the outer crowd. It opened up vague possibilities of self-denial, trial and probation, and a prospect of endurance through good and evil, thick and thin, which delighted his ardent soul.

'Then that is settled,' said Sebastian, contentedly. 'We can talk about your going away later.'

It was towards the close of this conversation that Sebastian had been called away to Myles Heywood—the day therefore, before the ball at Castle Hill.

On the following afternoon Sebastian had to go out. His mother asked him at lunch if he intended to go to the dance, and he said yes, he supposed he did—he must now; but he did not care about it, and did not think it was in very good taste to be having balls at such a time. Moreover, he had heard a rumour that Mr. Spenceley's own affairs caused him some anxiety.

Mrs. Mallory said she supposed it was Mr. Spenceley's own business; he ought to know best whether he were able to give balls at such a time. He could not put off his daughter's twenty-first birthday for an indefinite time.

'No,' said Sebastian, 'and that is just what makes the whole affair such a melancholy farce. His daughter is very anxious not to have any ball. She told me so, and nearly cried with vexation about it.'

Mrs. Mallory made no reply, and Sebastian, saying he had a meeting to attend, went out.

Hugo was that afternoon in one of his oft-recurring idle moods, and wandered about, apparently not knowing what to do with himself. He was anticipating the ball eagerly enough, having extracted from Helena the promise of no less than three waltzes—less of a distinction than he imagined, perhaps, since Helena, in granting them, had been thinking chiefly of escaping from the defective dancing and fatuous remarks of the Thanshope young men, amongst whom she enjoyed what she considered a fatal popularity. She had wondered whether to keep any dances for Sebastian. Would he ask her to dance at all?

'Of course he will!' she thought, 'as a matter of duty, and I think I shall fill up my programme, and show it him without any comment when he asks me. Then he will raise his eyebrows in that way I hate, and make a little bow, and smile a little smile, and remark, "I see I am indeed too late;" and stand

on one side, perfectly content not to dance, since the nicest girl he ever knew is not there.'

But these workings of the feminine mind could not possibly be known to Hugo, who was only aware that he had received an indulgent smile and a pleasant glance from Helena's dark eyes, as she protested a little against the three waltzes, but yielded in the end. He repaired to the drawing-room and, with characteristic fitfulness, spent the whole afternoon in playing waltzes, good, bad, and indifferent, of every kind and from every source he could think of. Waltz after waltz flowed from his rapid fingers. Gung'l and Strauss, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert—ancient and modern composers—good and bad ones, were laid under contribution, till his whole being seemed a waltz, and he was in a state of highly-strung nervous excitement and anticipation, with which mingled the memories of past waltzes with partners of a bygone day. Hugo felt his whole soul penetrated with music, melody, and happiness as he sat in the shady corner of the drawing-

room and saw the sun stream warmly in at the side window. He felt life that afternoon very full, and rich, and delicious, and crowded with sweet and grand possibilities. He felt at harmony with all the world, and was sure it was a good place to live in.

He had just finished the solemn, passionate strains of a waltz of Beethoven's, and still his fingers lingered on the keys, and still his ear drank in the glorious notes, when the door opened and Mrs. Mallory came into the room.

Hugo stopped playing. She did not openly request him to do so, but he knew she disliked to hear him, and to his fastidious taste, the very presence of an unsympathetic spirit was jarring. Spontaneity ceased; pleasure was gone.

He rose from the instrument, went to the sunny window, and hummed over the air he had been playing.

'At what time do we go to-night, Mrs. Mallory?' he presently inquired.

'Go where?'

'To the ball.'

'At eight o'clock, I believe,' she said, with stony coldness. Mrs. Mallory's anger was coming to a climax now. It would be strange if Hugo did not say something which should cause the storm to break over his head. Unconsciously, unwittingly, he led straight up to the point.

'I should like to dance every night,' he said rather enthusiastically, for his music still haunted him, and even Mrs. Mallory's chill influence could not quite bring him down from his heights of abstraction to the commonplaces of every day—yet.

'Very likely,' she said. 'I have noticed that the more frivolous a thing is, the more you delight in it.'

'Dancing is not necessarily frivolous,' Hugo assured her with the greatest solemnity. 'It is, or should be, an art; not a mere kicking about of the legs.'

'Indeed!'

'When I grow up,' continued Hugo, 'that is to say, when I am *majorat*, come of age, I mean, and come into my property, I shall

devote a great part of my time to dancing—I love it so.'

This was too much, far too much. It was high time that this vain, bombastical, self-conceited pauper was put down.

'When you come into your property,' she remarked with polite sarcasm, 'then you can squander it just as you please. But I would advise you first to make certain that you have any property to come into.'

'Oh, I don't suppose I shall be rich. Sebastian knows all about it. He says he will explain all in good time.'

'Sebastian is as foolish a young man, in some respects, as I know; and as for you, Mr. von Birkenau, I am at a loss to understand how any one professing to be a gentleman can behave as you do.'

'As how?' demanded Hugo, his brow suddenly clouding as he perceived that her words bore reference to something unknown to him.

'Did Sebastian ever tell you, in so many words, that you had any property, any money, estate, possessions of any kind?'

'N—no.'

'I thought so. He is very trying, but I have always found him sincere, so far. I should have thought that very fact would have led you to think a little about your own position. That you can quietly accept another man's bounty, and never ask the reason of it, never inquire into your own affairs, or ask whether you are living in a manner suitable to your future prospects—it is incredible! No one with any sense of honour could conduct himself in such a manner.'

'I do not know what you mean—Sebastian knows,' said Hugo, a dread suspicion beginning to creep into his heart. 'He is my guardian, and I live as *he* pleases, of course. You know I do.'

'Your guardian! That is about all he has to guard, I think.'

'He is my guardian, and the guardian of my property, however small it may be. I dare say, to you, I may seem almost a beggar, but Sebastian——'

'You make me pity you! I do not think

it right that you should live under such a delusion any longer. Let me tell you that you have no property except what my son gives you. You live on his bounty. But for him you would be a beggar.'

'You are not speaking the truth!' said Hugo, suddenly standing before her and bending his flashing eyes upon her. 'You know you are not speaking the truth.'

'"Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

Am I not? You had better ask Sebastian. It was he who told me. I thought you considered him perfect in all respects—not being his mother.'

'Sebastian told you that I lived on him—that he——'

'That your mother committed you to his charge, and he took it into his head to adopt you. That, except what he gives you, you have *nothing*. He told me that, and I think it best that you should know it, for I consider your behaviour and conversation very unfit for your position. That is all that I have to say, or want to hear, upon the subject.'

Mrs. Mallory's moral equilibrium was almost restored; she felt distinctly more cheerful and better satisfied with everything. For Hugo there remained only a hideous chaos, a general *bouleversement* of his fixed, contented conceptions of life and his sphere in it.

He walked out of the room, and stood in the hall a moment. What should he do—whither go? This was no place for him. He had no right here. He was the object of a rich man's pitying charity—a beggar. Mrs. Mallory had said it, and said it after a fashion which left no doubt possible. Instead of playing a grand piano in a luxurious drawing-room, instead of going to balls and dancing with beautiful young women of large fortune, and driving about, and riding fine horses—all belonging to another man—instead of this, he ought to be—what? Well, if Sebastian had left him at the institution where he was being brought up, the authorities would at least have found him a trade and apprenticed him to it; he might have been at this moment a

shopman, or an usher, or a clerk, or somebody's secretary and amanuensis. At least, he would not have been anybody's dependent, loaded with so many obligations that their weight crushed and overpowered him.

By this time he had almost unconsciously ascended the stairs, and found himself in his own room. What must he do? It was impossible to let such a state of things continue any longer. What remained? To go, of course! The idea flashed like an inspiration upon him. He would fly—now, at once. Sebastian was out; Mrs. Mallory would certainly not try to prevent his departure. What should he take? what leave? He made an excited rush to his wardrobe, his drawers, and began to turn them out. Then another idea struck him. That would not do. They were all Sebastian's things. Not one of them but had been bought with Sebastian's money. He could not take any of them. It would be stealing. He looked down with a shudder at the very clothes he wore. No—he must take nothing; but he must go—he

must get away from here, and go and earn some money, and pay Sebastian back.

But he never could do that. How could he repay the kindness, the advice, the friendship—the care that had watched over him, the generosity which had condoned a thousand impertinences and wayward, wearisome fancies? No money, no service could ever repay these things. But at least he must get away — must remove himself. That very generosity which he had so often proved might, for anything he knew, have wearied of him long ago, though it would never say so.

He rose with the vague intention of getting out of the house with as few impedimenta as possible, and, once out of it, never to re-enter it. And then memory and conscience again asserted themselves. What was it that he had promised Sebastian only last night? Not to do anything of any importance without first telling him of his intention. He could not even go, for he would not begin his new career by breaking his word to the man to whom he owed everything. He must wait.

'Oh, Sebastian!' groaned the poor boy, flinging himself face downwards upon a couch at the foot of his bed, 'it was cruel, cruel of you! you should not have cheated me thus!'

Men of Hugo's temperament weep sometimes with almost womanly facility, and Hugo, in his new-born anguish and despair, wept now; and when the weeping was over, he did not rise, but remained with his face buried in the cushions, repeating to himself every item of Sebastian's generosity, and his own blind, besotted self-confidence and ignorant assumption (such it appeared to him). A thousand things rose up in his memory, and he asked himself how he could have failed to comprehend their meaning, to have some suspicion of his real position. He resolved, with more and more impassioned eagerness, to *go;* to wait till he had redeemed his promise, and then to say farewell, and bid Sebastian forget him. How his heart ached at the thought! But no alternative was open to him. He was a gentleman. No gentleman could knowingly continue to live as he had been doing.

The time went on; whether long or short, he could not tell. He did not keep count of the minutes or hours. His whole consciousness seemed to resolve itself into a desire to be gone, which had grown overpowering and intense, when a quick tap at the door was heard; then it was opened, and Sebastian's voice said:

'I say, Hugo, do you mean to go to this entertainment or not; because if—why, what *is* the matter with you?'

'I never knew, Sebastian! Upon my soul and honour I never knew till Mrs. Mallory told me to-day!' exclaimed Hugo, starting up and confronting his horrified friend, with pale face, scintillating eyes, which bore traces of recent weeping, hair wildly tossed up and down his head, and generally demoralised aspect.

'Didn't know *what*, my dear fellow? What is all this excitement about?'

'Mrs. Mallory told me, just a little while ago, the *truth* about myself,' said Hugo, speaking rapidly and vehemently in German,

as he nearly always did when agitated, and he began to stride excitedly about the room. 'It was not right . . . no, no! it was very cruel; you should not have done it. I have no right to reproach you, but you should not have laid such a burden upon me—a burden which is greater than I can bear . . . *aber, Gott im Himmel!* what do I mean by reproaching you, when I owe you the very bread I eat, the very clothes I wear! Sebastian! Sebastian! It was not *right!*' he reiterated passionately, coming to a stop, and standing before the other, upon whose mind the truth began to dawn.

His mother had played the traitor—had betrayed the trust which he had been weak enough to repose in her before he had understood her so well as he did now, and the result must be, in any case, a very painful explanation, and perhaps failure to convince Hugo; perhaps the alienation of a love which he prized more highly at this present moment than he ever had done before. For the moment, the first moment, his heart sank

very low; he suddenly seemed to see everything that he most prized deserting him. Adrienne was lost to him, and his heart was yet smarting under that conviction. Yesterday he had seen Myles Heywood depart, expressing his gratitude, but, as he felt, unconquered, untouched at heart. Now, here was Hugo bitterly reproaching him for not having done what was right towards him. One stroke coming upon the other almost unmanned him momentarily, for the men with warm hearts and cool heads are necessarily more susceptible both to failure and success, than the men with cool heads and cold hearts to boot.

Then he suddenly gathered himself together. Hugo was not gone; he was only drifting away from him. He would make a very strong struggle to still hold him fast to him; if he succeeded, he might take it as a good omen for the future—if not, the future must look after itself. He came into the room, and closed the door.

'You startle me, Hugo. This is something

I did not expect. Suppose you tell me all about it, and we can discuss it; shall we?'

'There is nothing to be discussed. If it had not been for my promise to you yesterday, I should not be here now. As it is, I waited; but only to say that I am going at once—to clear myself—to tell you that I never knew . . .'

'Why, Hugo, how *could* you know? If you had known, you would not have been what you are to me, the frank, open-hearted comrade, whose friendship and companionship have made me so happy.'

'If I had known,' said Hugo, 'I should not have behaved myself like a mountebank, such as I must have seemed to you many a time, with my impertinences and fancies. Mrs. Mallory is quite right—for me to be thinking of balls, and amusements, and enjoyments is folly—madness. What an ape! what a confounded, conceited, self-important *ape* I must have seemed all these years! Acting as if I had great prospects before me, while all the time I am a beggar. It is hideous!'

He was getting excited again. His eyes began to flash, and his foot to beat the floor restlessly. Sebastian noticed that he had not once looked at him during all this scene, but away from him; anywhere rather than meet his eyes.

'Let me go!' he added, in a choked voice. 'Let me go, and forget me. That is all you and I can do, and it must be done at once.'

'You will never leave me, any more than I can, or shall try to forget you.'

'Why? Because I am under such obligations to you, that you can force me to obey you from very shame?' asked Hugo bitterly.

'Not at all, Hugo, but because you love me, and I love you (if it were not so, after all these years, it would be strange), and you could never find it in your heart to wound me as such a proceeding would wound me.'

At last Hugo's eyes turned to him; at last he stood still and looked at him, and Sebastian returned the look from his inmost heart. This soul-to-soul, searching gaze was a prolonged one, and Hugo at last, turning away,

sat down on the sofa again, put his hand before his face, and said in a broken voice:

'You could always do what you liked with me, and you can now. What do you want?'

'I only want you to listen to me and *believe* me,' said Sebastian. 'If you will only believe me, all will be well.'

A movement of the head showed that Hugo was listening.

'You have called me cruel—you have said that what I have done was not right. I cannot bear such accusations unmoved. Why have I been cruel?'

'In putting me into a false position—making me believe myself to be what I am not.'

'Somewhat insincere it may have been, but I do not see how I could well have acted otherwise. When your mother died you were equally badly off, so far as worldly circumstances go, as you are now. *You* did not know it. It was her weakness that she could not bear you, whom she adored, to know it. She had a horror of your learning that the

77521

institution at which you were being educated was a ch—I mean——'

'A charity-school—yes.'

'That's right, old fellow! Put it as spitefully as you can. If you like, it *was* a charity-school—and a poor, coarse, inadequate place, too, not the place for you. When I think of *you* there, it is horrible; I simply took the place of the authorities of that school towards you. They had nothing to bind them to you; no single tie existed. *I* had everything. I had been your mother's intimate friend; she gave me, in her goodness, that which no service of mine could repay. I reverenced her in her lifetime, and I reverence her memory now. She knew what I wished; I discussed it with her fully and freely, and she gave her unqualified consent. She trusted you to me—gave you to me. Have you any right to impute wrong motives to her memory? you remember her perfectly well. You know what she was. You must know that she never acted but, as she thought, from right and pure motives.'

'I know; that alters it. But all the same it is very hard.'

'I feel it so,' said Sebastian. 'Year by year, I have been more glad that I had you as my firm and faithful friend, who would never desert me, whatever any one else did. I firmly believed that it was so, and you—you have so little regard for me, that you would leave me—quit me here at an hour's notice, and why? Because you cannot, or will not, rise above a few miserable, material interests; because you let a few paltry, sordid coins (that is what it comes to) raise themselves between you and me, and make them into a wall which neither of us can pass. Yet you told me the other night that you *could* not be fickle—to me. Which am I to believe—your words, or your actions?'

'You may believe both, now, when I tell you that I will do what you please. Shall I stay? I will do whatever you like—just whatever you like,' said Hugo, in a dull, toneless kind of voice.

'You call that doing what I please—re-

maining, though you hate it. I thought—last night I was sure that it would have caused you pain to leave me.'

'It will—would, I mean, cause me agony; but what am I to think, when you have told Mrs. Mallory, who hates me, my whole story, and kept it from me, whom you say you love?'

'There I was wrong, Hugo—utterly wrong, I own it. Had I known—but I must not say that. If I had it to do now, I should keep silence. But if you will not allow me *one* mistake, take your own way. Leave me alone. My mother opposes my wishes bitterly. The girl I love won't have a word to say to me. I have no one left, but Hugo von Birkenau—and he begs to decline my acquaintance. So be it!'

He turned to leave the room. His hand was on the door-handle, when Hugo overtook him.

'Stop!' said he, almost in a whisper. 'You know me better than I know myself. I cannot leave you thus. If I thought I was of any good to you——'

'I suppose I should go through all this, to keep a thing I didn't care for. That is so like me!' observed Sebastian.

'Yes,' said Hugo, with a half-laugh, half-choke, or sob; 'I never thought of that.'

'Of course not. You wish to repay me, as you call it, Hugo. The only way in which you can do it is to let me watch your future, as I have always hoped to do, till you are famous, and I am known as your greatest friend, eh?'

Hugo smiled faintly.

'Your mother despises me,' he began.

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

'My dear boy, you must have seen that my mother is by no means graciously disposed towards any one or anything that I may have the misfortune to be fond of. As I like you better almost than any one, she naturally dislikes you proportionately. It is not a pleasant thing to have to say, but it is true. Surely, if you and I understand each other, it does not matter what outsiders think of us.'

'No,' said Hugo, and once more there was heartiness and confidence in his tone. 'Forgive me my folly. It is over now.'

'I thank you for making such a sacrifice to me. . . . When I came into the room it was to see what you were doing, as you didn't appear at dinner. And, behold, nearly an hour has passed. The carriage will be here in ten minutes.'

'I don't think I shall go.'

'Pray do, though, or I shall have to think that this reconciliation is only a sham one after all. Besides, Helena's *beaux yeux* will not turn very amiably towards me, if I come without you.'

'It depends upon yourself how Helena's *beaux yeux* regard you,' said Hugo; 'but I will go. It would be insulting to her if I did not. I'll get ready now.'

'I must do the same,' said Sebastian, leaving the room.

Hugo proceeded to dress himself. He found himself looking back upon the afternoon, when he had sat playing waltzes, as if

it had been separated by years from the evening, and his present self was a stranger to himself of yesterday.

It was quite true. These few short hours had transformed him from a boy to a man. The process, which in some cases is one of such prolonged, lingering growth, had been with him effected at a leap, a single bound. The change proved itself most in the fact that he accepted the cross laid upon him; he felt himself possessed of that goodly, manly virtue, the ability to wait; two days ago he would have tried to rush away from pain and difficulty—now he could shake hands with them. As he dressed, he planned his course as it should be, subject to circumstances; not with the furious, fitful temper of an hour ago, but with calm, manly reasonableness and judgment.

When the carriage came round they stood in the hall, and Mrs. Mallory looked curiously at his pale, altered, composed countenance; but she saw in an instant, by the look that passed between him and Sebastian, that all

was perfectly clear between them. The sweet accord of two noble natures was a thing beyond her power to grasp; but she saw that she had not succeeded in separating them, and recognised that she had done her cause no service by her interference.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW HELENA CAME INTO HER FORTUNE.

THE rooms at Castle Hill were nearly full, and the ball had just begun, when the Oakenrod party arrived. Sebastian offered his arm to his mother, and she took it, both of them having a very strong sense of the fact that the courtesy was a mere outside show, and that they would rather have been any number of miles apart. Followed by Hugo, they penetrated through the large square hall and the coffee-room, to the drawing-room, which blazed in the full splendour of unlimited wax-lights. In the centre of the room, looking very hot and very uncomfortable, they found Mrs.

Spenceley, alone. Her lord was nowhere to be seen, though her son was stationed at some little distance from her, helping her in the discharge of her duties with a Thanshopian grace and dignity all his own.

Sebastian, when his mother had finished her greetings and congratulations, went up to Mrs. Spenceley, and in his turn paid his *devoirs.*

The lady bore upon her face distinct traces of uneasiness of mind. There was something terrible and *bizarre* in the contrast between her expression and her attire. Helena had considerately tried to arrange her dress for her, with the natural sense of beauty and harmony of colour and material which she so strongly possessed. She had endeavoured to soften down the radiant hues contemplated by Mrs. Spenceley, and had succeeded in inducing her, rather, to dress herself in a magnificent robe of black satin. Diamonds twinkled upon her spacious bosom, and diamond pins fastened her gorgeous lace cap. Here Helena's efforts had ceased to produce any effect. At

this point Mrs. Spenceley's own taste in dress asserted itself. She had thrown over her shoulders a floating scarf of crimson gauze, intertwined with lines of orient gold, and over which wandered abnormally large bunches of abnormally large grapes—purple grapes, with leaves of the same phenomenal proportions. This treasure had been put on in order, as she explained to Helena, 'to cover my shoulders and give me a little colour; for, say what you will, a black satin and a white lace cap is not full enough for a woman of my years.'

In despairing resignation Helena had submitted, and the result was the apparition already described, looking, with the troubled, puzzled expression on her highly-coloured face, and the restless wandering of her gentle dark eyes, altogether so grotesque, that Sebastian's quick observation instantly suspected something behind the gay show which surrounded them.

'I'm glad to see you, Mr. Mallory,' she said, giving him her hand, and with an effort giving her attention to him. 'I hope you'll enjoy

yourself, I'm sure. We've done all we could think of to make people enjoy themselves; but it is *very* provoking, Spenceley's not coming at the last minute, isn't it?'

'I thought I missed Mr. Spenceley. Is he engaged?'

'Oh, it's this horrid business, you know. I said to him, I said, "Spenceley, if business is so uncertain, it's a very sure thing that we oughtn't to be giving balls in this style;" not but what I am *very* glad to see you, and I hope you'll enjoy it,' she hastened to add. 'He had to go off to Liverpool early this morning, and he said he *might* have to come home by Manchester, but he'd try to be with us before we begun. However, he hasn't turned up.'

'Very likely he has been detained.'

'I expect so. These are anxious times, and it keeps a man on the strain, with things going first up and then down, and not knowing how anything will turn out,' said Mrs. Spenceley lucidly. 'But aren't you going to dance, Mr. Mallory? There's lots of young

ladies will be delighted to dance with you. See! there's little Fanny Kay sitting out—the first dance, too. Do you know her?'

'Yes, thank you. I don't think I will dance at present. I'm looking for Miss Spenceley, to congratulate her; but she is not here, I think.'

'She's in the ball-room. You see, she had to open the ball, being for her own birthday and all, and some of them were very anxious to begin. It makes it very awkward, Spenceley's being away. But you'll see Helena directly, I dare say. She said she should come straight here when the dance was over.'

'I think I will go and see if it is over,' said Sebastian, who saw Hugo leading off a white-robed virgin to the ball-room.

'Ay, do; I'm sure they must be nearly done by now,' she replied, drawing her dazzling scarf more closely about her, and obstinately refusing to lessen her fatigue by sitting down.

Sebastian crossed the hall, and, at the door of the ball-room, met Helena and her partner

coming out. She was leaning on the arm of an elderly man, one of the Thanshope magnates, to whose lot it had fallen to guide her through the mazes of a duty-quadrille, by way of opening the ball. Helena looked bored, and the gentleman no less so. They were making straight for the drawing-room, in order to get rid of each other as soon as possible.

Helena did not at once see Sebastian, and he had time to notice how downcast and pale she looked, although so lovely. Mr. Rawson, her partner, was at this moment 'collared' in a summary manner by an acquaintance, and appeared particularly anxious to talk with him on congenial subjects. Mr. Mallory, therefore, seized the opportunity to advance and say:

'Good-evening, Miss Spenceley.'

Helena started, and turned quickly to him.

'Mr. Rawson,' proceeded Sebastian, 'I see you are engaged. Allow me to take Miss Spenceley to the drawing-room—or wherever else you please,' he added, in a lower voice,

as Mr. Rawson, with evident gratitude, gave up his charge, and they walked away, her hand resting lightly on his arm.

'Now he is happy with a friend of his own age,' remarked Sebastian. 'I could not find you in the drawing-room, so I came to seek you, in order to offer you my sincere congratulations upon this occasion.'

'Why so *sincere?* You speak so emphatically that I begin to doubt your sincerity. Why congratulate me at all?'

What a question! I always understood, from your own words, that you looked forward to your twenty-first birthday as a moment of emancipation, when you would not be trodden down any more, and could really show the sex which fails to meet your approval what you think of them, and——'

'I wish you would not keep talking in that way,' said Helena. 'It does not amuse me in the least, and I don't see what fun there is in it.'

'Fun! I had no idea of fun! You shock me. I am in the most solemn earnest. I

beg to be allowed to offer my congratulations to the heroine of the present occasion, and to wish you "many happy returns of this day." You will permit me to do that?'

'I am not a heroine, and the present occasion requires anything but congratulations,' was all Helena said.

Her wonted brilliance and high spirits had quite deserted her, even in the presence of Sebastian Mallory, for whose delectation they were usually wont to flow rather more rapidly than at other times. In this new and more pensive mood Sebastian found the charm, which he had always owned, a strong one. He had never before found her so attractive. Her dress was less splendid, and more airy and girlish, than usual. It was white, and full, and flowing, suggestive of *tulle illusion* and silvery clouds, and was dotted all over with little bunches of rosebuds. There was a string of pearls around her lovely throat; and, for all her paleness and downcast looks, her beauty came out triumphant.

'She is a lovely creature!' he thought,

glancing downwards at the serious face and the dark lashes which swept her cheek.

'Not a heroine!' he said. 'You must be one to-night, whether you like it or not. And as for congratulations, I could offer you a hundred reasons why people should congratulate you; but, to confine myself to one, you are Helena Spenceley. Don't you think that is reason enough for congratulation?'

They had wandered into a little anteroom, divided by curtains from one of the other sitting-rooms, and as Sebastian asked the last question, they were standing in the middle of the room, and Helena looked at him. Her face was sad, and her eyes were bright with tears.

'It is of no use; you cannot make me angry to-night, even by laughing at me; but if you want the satisfaction of knowing that your remarks wound me, take it: it is so.'

'Helena! Miss Spenceley!' he stammered, in confusion, for his words had not been free from malice, and he knew it. What he had not known was that Helena was in no mood

for battle—that she did not even wish to quarrel with him.

'If you are offended I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I did not mean anything like what you imagine. And, since you do not choose to be congratulated, I withdraw the congratulations. May I say you have my good wishes?'

'Not unless you mean it,' said Helena coldly; 'and, when you think how different our thoughts, and wishes, and hopes, and objects in life are, you will, I hope, hesitate before making more pretty speeches.'

'You are very severe. I think I had better say no more upon the subject. But,' he added, with that air of almost affectionate interest, which Helena believed she so greatly resented, 'you are downcast and out of spirits to-night—not as you should be for your own birthday ball. How is it?'

In so matter-of-fact a tone was the question asked, that Helena scarcely felt it strange that he should put it, and began in a docile manner to explain.

'How can I be otherwise? It is such nonsense. What is the good of having a ball? I don't want a ball. I wanted to be quiet. I go about every day, from house to house, and see people starving—much better people than I am, or ever shall be—and then I have to come home, and see money flung away on a ball—for me—because such an important personage has condescended to live twenty-one years in this horrid, grimy old world; and to put on a dress that has cost—no, I will never reveal all my shame, but I could tear my dress to pieces when I think of a woman whom I saw this afternoon, and who was crying as if her heart would break, because she had to pawn her husband's and children's Sunday clothes, and their best tea-things, that she had when she was married. I thought of this dress, which was got on purpose for me at Paris, and which cost about ten times as much as the materials that made it are worth,' said Helena passionately, 'and when I put it on, I felt as if I were putting on my shroud.'

'I am very sorry—only you won't believe it, because I say so, but surely now it will be different? You must not get morbid. That never does any good. You will have wealth of your own now, and be your own mistress, when you can take your revenge on all these fine clothes, and go about in home-spun, or even sackcloth, if you choose.'

'Yes,' said Helena dispiritedly, 'I know; but I should not like it. I love expensive things, and I hate coarse and common ones. And I am beginning to think that perhaps I am not such a very fit person to have money. I have heard a great deal about money lately, and I don't fancy it is so easy to manage as I used to think.'

'Miss Mereweather will assist you,' he said, half smiling.

'Don't name Miss Mereweather to me,' said Helena, with sudden animation. 'She has deceived me cruelly. I never was so cut-up about anything.'

'What *has* she done?'

'She has got married,' said Helena, in a

determined voice, as if anxious to get the worst over.

'Got married! . . . Why . . . and a very good wife she will make, if she has got the right sort of husband. I remember thinking that evening I met her here, what a capital head of a large establishment she would make. . . .'

'Did you?' said Helena, with a curious quaver in her voice, half laughter, half astonishment. 'Well, you must have been right. She has married a clergyman who is the head of a very large boys' school—a sort of college.'

'The very thing for her. I wish, when you write, you would ask if she remembers my insignificance, and offer my warmest congratulations and good wishes.'

'When I write!' echoed Helena scornfully. 'I wrote to her once, after I heard of it, but never again. I told her my mind.'

'Did you really? What did you say?'

'I said she was a traitor to her sex and her cause, and that, as I still held my old

opinions, I could not be her friend any longer.'

'How awful for her! May I ask whether she made any reply?'

'Oh, yes!' said Helena, her colour rising. 'She made a very stupid reply.'

'Won't you tell me what it was?'

'No; it was too silly.'

'I believe you got the worst of it.'

'At least, it was too ridiculous to repeat.'

'Perhaps she said, "Wait and see;" or, "Don't shout till you are out of the wood!" only more elegantly expressed.'

'She—oh, there is Hugo coming. This is my first dance with him.'

'Miss Spenceley, will you be very kind to Hugo to-night? Really and truly, he has had a great trouble.'

'I will. Poor boy!'

'And have you any dances left? A waltz? though I can hardly hope it. You must have been engaged long ago, for the whole evening?'

'In that case you might have spared your-

self the trouble of asking,' said Helena rather defiantly; but as their eyes met, hers wavered.

'Perhaps you have still one left,' said he, capturing her programme and opening it.

'It looks very full,' he said; 'but—ah, yes! here is one, a waltz—two waltzes. This is extraordinary—my luck, I mean; don't you think so? And may I——'

He paused, looking inquiringly at her as he held the pencil suspended over the card.

'Two waltzes!' exclaimed Helena innocently. 'Oh, but that must be a mistake. I know when Mr. Consterdine came just now I told him I had not one left.'

'No doubt you told him what was good for him,' said Sebastian, with laudable gravity. 'At least, we will make it quite sure now. There: "S. M., 6," and "S. M., 10." Thank you, very much.'

With a bow and a half smile he resigned her to Hugo, who came up at the moment to offer congratulations and to claim his dance, while Sebastian departed to while away the time until 'Number 6' should begin.

As he danced only once or twice with any one but Helena, he had ample opportunity of observing the general features of the entertainment, and he soon saw that Helena's depression was but a part of that obvious more or less throughout the whole assembly. The rooms were dazzling, the decorations were unutterably gorgeous, the brilliance of the lights amounted to an absolute glare, and became oppressive and terrible. On all sides there was evidence of the most lavish expenditure: flowers, furniture, attendants, refreshments, all seemed to cry in loud and blatant voices, 'Try us; we are of the very best. No stint here, because expense is no object, absolutely none at all.' It would have been exceedingly amusing, and Sebastian was by no means slow to see the humorous side of ambitious entertainments of that kind; but the amusing part of it was quite overcome and swamped by the great and nameless cloud and oppression that hung over it all. What was the reason of that cloud? Surely not the simple fact that the master of the house was

absent. That alone would have been a relief rather than otherwise.

For he came not, and came not, and poor Mrs. Spenceley still looked ill at ease : and at last Sebastian noticed some one else begin to look ill at ease too, and to glance round with a suspicious, watchful air now and then. That person was Frederick Spenceley. Something was wrong, something lay behind it all, thought Sebastian, as he stood in the cool hall after his first dance with Helena, that is to say, between ten and eleven o'clock. During that dance they had quite forgotten to flout each other, or to do anything but enjoy themselves. He had said all he could to raise that nameless cloud from her face, and he had been startled to find what brilliant success had attended his efforts. Helena had soon smiled again, and had half confessed that she had kept the two dances for him, and had even blushed and laughed when he teased her about it. He was thinking of that waltz, and humming the tune to which they had danced as he paced about the hall, while he

still seemed to feel Helena lightly resting in his arms, her fleet foot keeping pace with his ; and he began to wish that he had not four whole dances to wait before his next one with her came.

'She is very lovely, and there is something very bewitching about her,' he said to himself for the second time that evening.

A dance was going on in the ball-room, and the hall at the moment was empty, save for himself. He paused before a huge mirror, which had been raised at one end of it, and in front of which was erected a fragrant pyramid of flowers and ferns, delicate hot-house blossoms, and feathery, aromatic leaves. There was a blaze of light all around, and the staircase and part of the gallery running round the second story were reflected in the mirror. Sebastian stood before the pyramid of flowers, and gently touched first one and then another, and then his eyes fell upon the reflection of his own face, and he was surprised to see how grave it looked ; for he did not feel particularly grave at the moment, and that interview

with Adrienne Blisset seemed to hang like a dream in the far background of his consciousness, while another face and form, flower-crowned and glowingly beautiful, advanced to the front.

Suddenly he became conscious, as it were, of some shadow crossing the glass, and looking higher, to where the staircase was reflected, he saw the figure of a man stealing carefully, softly, noiselessly up the stairs, keeping well to the wall, with averted face, as if anxious to get as quickly as possible out of all that obtrusive glare of light, and stream of dancing sound.

Sebastian's first thought naturally resolved itself into the words, 'a thief in the night.' Some evil-disposed person who thought to penetrate to some of the bedrooms, in the confusion, and perhaps reap a harvest of neglected brooches, watches, or shawl-pins. In such a case, it was his duty at once to warn the servants, and he was in the act of turning to go and do so as quickly as possible, when the figure reached the head of the first

flight of stairs, and turned to mount the next. As this happened, Sebastian caught a momentary glimpse of the face. He was long-sighted, and not given to making mistakes in the matter of identity. The man who was stealing so quietly up the stairs in such evident fear of detection, was, one would suppose, the last person who should need to act in so strange a manner. It was Mr. Spenceley himself, the master of the house.

With great presence of mind Sebastian checked his movement to turn round, and neither started nor stirred, but stood pensively trifling with a fern leaf, as he gave himself time to reflect upon what had happened.

The vague, floating rumours which he had heard, as to the 'shakiness' of Mr. Spenceley's commercial position, recurred to his mind. Probably there was something in them. His own business and that of Mr. Spenceley lay in utterly different lines: he had not come across him in any commercial transactions; but he knew men who had, and who

were of opinion that Spenceley was playing rather a dangerous game. During those troublous years some fortunes were made, and many were lost—lost by men who seemed as little likely to fail as Mr. Spenceley of Castle Hill. Sebastian pictured the feelings of his mother, supposing she were to hear any such rumour—his mother, who was probably at that moment listening with affecting interest and politeness to some circumlocutory history from the lips of Mrs. Spenceley, *à propos* either of Fred or of Helena. This was the day on which Helena was to come into—not her whole fortune—that was only to happen at her father's death, or if she married—but of so much of it as would make her what many people would call a rich woman. Sebastian thought of this, and wondered if the fortune were but

'A fleeting show
For man's illusion given.'

His thoughts turned persistently to the girl with whom he had so lately been dancing. It was all in her honour, this ghastly, hollow

mockery of an entertainment, with its spectres and shadows flitting and stealing about. All for her! She was crowned with roses, which were indeed the fitting flower for so beautiful a rose as she was herself. Those great pearls round her neck, and those massive bracelets on her slender arm—his mind recalled each item of her dress, and, as it were, every line of her beauty; he saw her standing, as she had stood more than once that evening, with a crowd round her, of friends and well-wishers, for she was popular, who congratulated her, and brought her flowers and bouquets—chiefly roses—the flowers of love and triumph. And ever, as he pictured her thus, that shadowy, stealing figure seemed to lurk and crouch behind them, now uncovering its face a little, and then, with a smile of weird meaning, drawing the veil again. He shuddered a little, and turned hastily towards the ball-room; stood in the doorway and looked. Yes, there was Helena with Hugo; he was glad she was with Hugo; smiling and laughing with him, as they flew swiftly by, passed the

door, and her perfumed skirts brushed him, and sent an odd little thrill through him.

The ball progressed, and the evening grew drearier and drearier; he heard the excuses made by Mrs. Spenceley, and saw the care growing darker upon her brow; he heard the regrets of the guests, and saw the increasing uneasiness of the looks cast about him by Fred, with a strange sense that he alone could, if he chose, point the way upstairs, and say, 'You will find the explanation of all, if you go there and ask.'

As the tenth dance was about to begin, he saw Fred make some excuse to the lady whom he was leading to the ball-room; heard the words, 'Very sorry—back in a minute.' The young lady was put on a cushioned bench beside the wall, and Fred quickly departed, with a look of resolution on his face. Sebastian, with Helena on his arm, looked after Spenceley. He was going upstairs. Mallory, throughout all the dance, could not keep himself from wondering what was taking place in one of those upper rooms. What confession,

or what revelation? Were things very bad? Was the crisis a very critical one?

'You have become perfectly silent, Mr. Mallory — not to say morosé,' remarked Helena. 'And when I was dancing with Hugo, I saw you looking in upon us with a sort of glare. What is the matter?'

'Oh, nothing! Miss Spenceley, when did you last see your father?'

'This morning, quite early; you know we have breakfast at eight, because we are business people. He gave me these pearls that I have on, for a birthday present, and though I would much rather have had no presents, they were so beautiful, and I am so weak, that I was in ecstasies with them. But papa said he had very important business in Liverpool, and he might have to go to Manchester too. Still, he is very late,' she added, as they began to dance again.

The waltz was over. Every one was streaming into the supper-room; Helena, with Sebastian, remained in the ball-room, watching the people out, to see that all went,

when voices made themselves heard; young men were calling out, 'I say, Spenceley!'—'Where's Fred?'—'Who's to sit where?'—'Fred, Mrs. Spenceley wants to ask you something.'

'Where can Fred be?' exclaimed Helena, craning her neck to look round. 'It is very strange in him to go away just now, when he ought to be seeing after things.'

They were standing beside a door of the ball-room; not that leading into the hall, but one which opened into a passage leading to the billiard-room, and thence to the kitchen regions and offices. Almost as Helena spoke, the door was suddenly opened, and a young woman appeared, with frightened face, and widely-distended eyes, who, seeing Helena, began, after the manner of her kind, to wring her hands, and exclaim, in much agitation:

'Oh, Miss Spenceley! Where's missis? Oh, how dreadful! Oh!'

'What is the matter?' demanded Helena, in a clear, decided voice.

'Oh—master, m'! He's——'

'Stop!' said Sebastian, suddenly and sternly, as he took the girl's arm, and gave it a little shake, to restore her to her senses. 'Don't make such a noise! Miss Spenceley, wait here a moment. Come here!' he added to the girl—one of the housemaids—as he drew her into the passage, and closed the door. 'Now, what is the matter? Your master has returned. I saw him. Is he ill?'

'Oh, sir!' she said, with an hysterical sob, 'he's dead. He's lying on the sofa in his room, and——'

'Dead!' repeated Sebastian, and he knew in a moment what it meant. 'Where is Mr. Fred? Is he with him?'

'No, sir. I haven't seen him. I thought he was here.'

Sebastian, with a growing fear that the whole thing was much blacker and more dreadful than he had suspected, bade the young woman wait a moment, while he returned to Helena. He had rapidly reviewed the circumstances, and found there was nothing for it but to go to her. Fred

was gone: he did not like to let the idea, 'absconded,' shape itself, even in his mind; but all the same, it was there, like an ugly black spectre. To burst upon Mrs. Spenceley with such news would have been in the highest degree inhuman and improper. Helena alone remained to take this fearful burden upon her shoulders.

He found Helena standing in the same place in which he had left her, and the last of the guests disappearing through the hall to the supper-room. Helena was composed and calm, but her eyes, as they met his, told him that she suspected a catastrophe.

'I want you to come with me,' said he, drawing her arm through his, and speaking in a low, gentle voice, and then they stood in the passage, with the servant-maid.

'Show me the room where your master is, and do not speak,' he said to her; she was crying bitterly, in a cowed and helpless fashion, but was less excited, less inclined to shriek out her dreadful news to every one she met. Helena's face grew white, but she

neither trembled nor spoke, as they followed the girl up the back-stairs to a landing-door, which she threw open, and then they found themselves standing on the gallery which formed the landing, and from which all the bedroom-doors opened out.

'Which is your master's room?' asked Sebastian.

The maid pointed to a door, and cried more bitterly still, while Helena's face grew whiter and more set every minute.

'Have you seen Mr. Fred at all this evening?'

'I saw him run upstairs, sir, and then I saw him go to his own room; but he's not there now, and I've never seen him since.'

'Very well, you can go now; but remember, you are to be silent, or it will be worse for you. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir. I won't say nothing, indeed!' said the weeping young woman, going away with her muslin apron to her eyes.

He turned to Helena. He felt he must not defer it any longer. There was pity and

tenderness in his eyes and in his voice, as he said :

'Now, Helena, you are brave, and you must be as brave as you can to-night.'

'Tell me what it is!' she said; 'but don't keep me waiting any longer.'

'I must keep you waiting just a few moments,' said he. 'I want you to sit down here, and not move, while I go to your father's room—will you?'

'Yes,' said Helena, seating herself with a prompt docility which contrasted strangely with her white face and distended eyes.

Sebastian left her, walked into the room, and found it all as he had expected. Mr. Spenceley had committed suicide. He had taken prussic acid, and lay dead upon the couch at the foot of his bed. Sebastian, looking quickly round, saw a written paper lying on the floor at his feet. It was merely a scrap of paper, with the words :

'DEAR LIZZIE,—I am a ruined man, and I can't bear it. I've never made you very happy, and the best I can do is to leave you.

I don't know what will be left, but there is always your money of your own, and Nelly's, that I——'

Here it broke off. It was not torn; it was as if the facts had rushed over the man, as he wrote these words, and he had failed to pen another syllable. There was no proof that Fred had absconded, or that he knew his father's fate. Sebastian knew he must put the matter in the best light; but he felt himself an absolute certainty of conviction on the matter.

He took the paper and went out of the room, locking the door and putting the key in his pocket. Helena looked up as he came to her, but said not a word.

'Helena,' he began, 'from what has happened to-night, I fear your father has found that he is ruined.'

'Is that all?' said Helena, drawing a long breath of relief.

'No. That, if true, is the least part of it. Remember what this must have been to your father. Prosperity and success were his very *life*.'

'Do you mean that it has killed papa?' asked Helena with unnatural calm, fixing her eyes upon his face.

'I wish to spare your mother, or I would not tell you this. It has killed him—that is, he could not bear to live after such a fall. My poor child, your father has destroyed himself.'

'He has—oh!' came like a whisper from her white lips. Face, cheeks, brow, lips, were white as the dress she wore. She caught at a chair which stood near and supported herself upon it, looking at him with a stare of blank, utter horror, which he felt to be almost unbearable. For weeks afterwards he was haunted by the vision of the white figure in its cloudy dress; the roses scattered about it, all like one white marble figure, save the dusky hair and eyes which looked coal-black by contrast with her face.

'Think of your mother,' said he, feeling that that spell of horror must be broken, and he gently put his arm round her, and placed her in the chair on which she had been lean-

ing. She did not speak for a moment, but at last said :

'Oh, poor mamma ! If she only need not know.'

'I fear she must know a great deal of it.'

Then Helena put the question which he dreaded.

'But where can Fred be all this time ?'

'He is not in the house. He may have gone away to see if the failure is complete—if anything remains to be saved,' said Sebastian ; 'at any rate, he is not here.'

'Ah, yes !' said Helena, and no suspicion like Sebastian's conviction even for a moment troubled her mind. He gave her the paper he had found.

'I have read it ; I thought it best,' said he. 'And now I want you to go to your own room, and I will send Mrs. Spenceley to you, and ask all these people to go away. You will allow me !'

'You are very good,' said Helena calmly.

'You must break just what you think fit

to Mrs. Spenceley,' he added. 'There is no one but you to do it, and she will hear it best from you. For her sake, you will keep up this brave, calm behaviour till the worst is over.'

'Yes; and then?'

'Trouble yourself about nothing else to-night. I will see to everything until your brother comes back. I will stay here all night. You need not leave your room again.'

Helena rose without speaking; looked at him with an indescribable expression; her lips moved, as if she would have spoken; but, without a word, she turned and went to her room. Sebastian watched, until the door had closed after her, and that silence seemed to leave an enormous want in his heart. There was silence, except a murmur coming from the supper-room. That reminded him of his duty. With another earnest look at that closed door, he went downstairs.

He made his way to Mrs. Spenceley, and asked her to go to her daughter in her room.

With a deep flush of terror and foreboding, she went. Neither husband nor son was there to support her. A stranger took her to the foot of the stairs and left her. Sebastian's soul was quite possessed with the idea of these two women; one telling, the other learning the extent of their awful calamity, so far as it was known. It haunted him, but he gathered himself together, and, easily catching the attention of the startled company, he merely told them that Mrs. and Miss Spenceley wished him to express their great regret at having to leave their guests, in consequence of very distressing news which they had just received. Frederick Spenceley had had to leave home immediately, and he thought, as it was already late, the kindest thing they could do would be to leave the house as soon as possible.

Amidst a wild buzz of inquiries, suggestions, and speculations, the guests dispersed. In an hour the house was quiet, and Helena had gently told her mother the whole truth as far as she knew it.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOWN IN THE WORLD.

IT was not until late in the afternoon of the following day, that Sebastian, not forgetting his appointment with Myles Heywood, found it possible to return to his own home.

That was a dreadful day, bringing in its course fresh disclosures of dishonesty on the part of both father and son of the Spenceleys; fresh shame and humiliation to the sorely proved Helena; fresh bursts of wild, hopeless weeping and meaningless questions, from her poor mother. Mrs. Spenceley was, of course, perfectly bewildered by everything, and could only reiterate that she had told Spenceley, over

and over again, that if business was so precarious, they had no right to be giving balls; and she knew it would turn out badly, she had said so all along. Then a fresh burst of weeping, and the inquiries:

'Helena, my dear, I s'pose we shall have to leave here. What do you think we shall be allowed to keep? Will everything have to be sold?'

To all of which Helena, pale, composed, and gentle, made answers as soothing as she could.

It was upon her head that the cruellest shame and humiliation naturally fell. Sebastian asked her, almost as soon as he met her in the morning, what friends or relations there were, with whom he could communicate on the subject of her father's death, and to whom he could resign his present authority.

'But there is Fred,' said poor, unconscious Helena. 'He is sure to be back soon. He will come by one of the early trains from Manchester, I am sure.'

'I doubt it,' said Sebastian, feeling his task

a hard one. 'And even if he did, it is not right that your friends or relations should not be summoned. Don't think I wish to withdraw the little assistance I can offer you, but I have no right to the position. It is absolutely necessary that I give the responsibility into some proper hands.'

'I don't know of any one except Uncle Robert, and papa and he were not good friends. He is mamma's brother. I think he would come if we sent for him.'

'Where does he live?'

'In Manchester; I will give you his address,' said Helena.

When she had done so, Sebastian telegraphed to Mr. Robert Bamford, requesting him to come over as soon as possible on urgent business. An answer came to the effect that Mr. Bamford would arrive sometime in the afternoon. It was for his appearance that Sebastian waited. He and Helena were in the library. He was trying to explain to her the circumstances which had made it possible for her father to fail, and Helena was giving her

best attention, but, with all the goodwill in the world, utterly helpless before the technical business terms and details. Her sad face, with its serious, puzzled look, was in sharp contrast with that of the Helena Spenceley whom Sebastian had always hitherto known.

'You see,' said she, suddenly looking up at him, with a wan attempt at a smile, 'you had every right to laugh at me when I boasted my business capacities. No one could be more ignorant. I see it now.'

'It was not unnatural,' said he gently. 'People with a cheque-book and a balance at the banker's are apt to think they understand business, when they don't. But it is of no consequence, really. The thing has happened, and if you had known all the secrets of the Stock Exchange, you could not have prevented it.'

'No, I know,' said Helena, looking wearily round. 'I wonder if Fred will come back with Uncle Robert. I dare say he has been to consult him; don't you think so?'

'It may be so; at least, your uncle will be able to tell us something about him.'

'How I wish it was all over!' she went on, 'and that we were safely housed in, wherever we go to—some back street in Manchester, I dare say.

'Oh, it may not be so bad as that.'

'I never said I thought that would be bad,' said Helena, leaning her elbows, as if utterly tired out, upon the table, and resting her head upon her hands. Sebastian felt a deep pity stir his heart. She had already suffered so much—she had still so much more, and so much worse to suffer. Perhaps all this pain would make her what people, what he himself, would call 'more reasonable.' But she was very sweet in her unreasonableness. It seemed rather sad that she must go through such an ordeal in order that she might become like other people.

At this point a servant announced 'Mr. Robert Bamford,' and Helena's uncle arrived. Now, Sebastian felt sure some painful truths would have to be told, and he again looked

with a strange strength of compunction at the beautiful, weary, white face of Helena.

Mr. Bamford was a very plain, rough-spoken man indeed, who walked with a heavy step into the room, glanced at Sebastian from a pair of shrewd, dark eyes, and without waiting for an introduction, gave a stiff little nod and said, 'Your servant, sir;' and then turned to his niece with the greeting, 'Well, Helena, this is a pretty business.'

'It is very sad, uncle,' said she, facing him, pale, and with dilated eyes. 'I think we had better not talk about it, but see what is to be done.'

'There's not much left to be done now that yon precious brother o' yours has given us the slip.'

'*What?*' said Helena, growing paler than before, and putting her trembling hands upon the table to support herself. 'Fred given you the slip—what do you mean? He has gone to see about papa's affairs. He—I expected him to come back with you. What has he done?'

There was no defiance in the tone, only apprehension.

'Done!' ejaculated Mr. Bamford, plunging his hands into his pockets and almost running about the room in his excitement. 'Done! why he's taken everything he could lay his hands on in the shape of money or money's worth, and he's off—perhaps to America, but certainly to the devil.'

'Do you mean that Fred has acted dishonourably?' asked Helena almost inaudibly, and trembling still more.

'Dishonourably! why you know nothing. Every one in Manchester knows it by this time. There's been precious little honour wasted on the whole business, my lass. We know what to think when the men make away with themselves one way or another, and leave the women and the debts behind them.'

'But my father—it was his misfortune—he did not——'

'The less said about your father's transactions, for the last six weeks, the better,' said Mr. Bamford curtly.

'Consider Miss Spenceley's feelings, sir!' interposed Sebastian, unable to endure seeing Helena's despair, and feeling a glow almost of hatred towards Mr. Bamford, and what struck him as his brutality. Helena had turned away and covered her face with her hand, as a man might do who is sorely hit on some vital point—it was more a man's gesture than a woman's. Neither groan nor cry escaped her, but Sebastian saw that the iron had entered into her soul. That which she endured was the keenest moral anguish—the supremest of all pains. He could understand it. Her beauty was enhanced: the reckless, impetuous girl with her 'disorganised' ideas, which he had laughed at before now, was transformed into the noble woman, who must bear things which only women can or do bear—the punishment for the sins of their masculine shields and protectors. 'She has had a very severe shock already,' he went on, 'and it cannot be necessary to pain her with——'

'She must know the truth, and the sooner

the better,' said Mr. Bamford irascibly. 'If she is a girl of spirit she will not wish to be deceived, and anyhow, her whole life will have to be changed, and come down a peg or two, for the sins of her father shall be visited upon her.'

'You are very kind, Mr. Mallory,' said Helena, turning to them again and speaking calmly, though her face had, even in those few minutes, taken an older, worn expression which shocked Sebastian. 'I wish to know the worst at once. I can bear it. I did not know there had been anything dishonourable. Go on, uncle. I am not afraid, and I must know what I have to tell my mother.'

'By ——, the lass has a spirit of her own!' observed Mr. Bamford. 'Now that I see what she's made of, I may try to explain things to her a bit.'

'Then I will leave you,' said Sebastian. 'Miss Spenceley will tell you that I made what arrangements were immediately necessary. I shall take the liberty of calling soon,' he added, to Helena, 'in the hope that I may be of some assistance to you. May I?'

'You are very kind,' she said, still with the same unmoved calm, as she gave him her hand. 'I shall be glad to see you whenever you call. Perhaps, another time, I can thank you better for your goodness; but, at present——'

'Pray do not thank me; there is not the very least necessity,' said he, as he left the room.

'Now, Uncle Robert!' said Helena.

'Who is that young fellow?'

'Mr. Sebastian Mallory.'

'Young Mallory of the Oakenrod, who has been acting the philanthropist since he came from abroad?'

'Has he? Yes, it is that Mallory.'

'Any particular friend of yours?'

'No,' was the cold response. 'He happened to hear first of my father's death last night, and as there was no one else here, and no one to do anything, he has been kind enough to arrange things for me since. I know very little of him.'

'H'm! ha! Well, we must get to business.'

In a very short time Helena was made acquainted with what had happened, and with the bare and naked outline of her approaching future life. The less said of her brother the better, said Mr. Bamford. He believed that the sum with which he had absconded was about two thousand pounds. As for her father—he softened his tone a little, out of consideration for Helena—he was to blame, too, for not drawing in when first he began to find himself in difficulties; 'Only that would have brought him down in the world, and he couldn't bear it; so, instead of going one step lower, and then climbing up again when he had a chance, he has waited, till he had to tumble down to the ground, and can never get up again,' remarked the merchant, dryly, while Helena listened.

She showed him the scrap of paper which Sebastian had given her.

'Yes,' said Mr. Bamford; 'that money of yours is a myth——'

'I'm glad to hear it,' said his niece, in a

deep, almost resentful tone. 'And if it had been there—every penny—I should not have kept it now, of course.'

'And what your mother was to have had—it's all in the business; was, I mean. It has gone with the rest.'

'I am glad of that, too,' observed Helena, concisely. 'Then no one will have the power to say that we were well off while other people suffered.'

'Your wardrobe and jewellery will be your own, of course. Your jewels and your mother's must be worth a pretty good sum, Helena.'

'My jewellery will be sold, and mamma's too.'

'Please yourself about your own; but if your mother is not your father's most pressing creditor, I don't know who is. Of course she will sell her jewels; but she will keep the proceeds, and you will abstain from meddling in matters you don't understand.'

'I understand right and wrong, uncle, and I shall do what I feel to be right.'

'Eh!' he repeated, with a kind of chuckle, 'the lass has a spirit in her after all.'

They would have to leave Thanshope. Helena must try to find some employment. He would give them a home until that was accomplished; to his sister as long as she chose to stay with him. If she liked she might keep house for him, but if she chose to also try some means of gaining a livelihood, he would do what he could to help her. More, he thought, they could not expect.

'Certainly not,' said Helena, composedly. 'We have no right to expect so much, and may consider ourselves fortunate in having you for a friend.'

She had always asked for work, she reminded herself when she was alone—real work, necessary work—not the fads with which rich women try to deceive themselves by calling them work. Behold! here was every prospect of as much work as she liked, and yet she found nothing cheering in it. Only—anything to get away from this sham life of sham luxury, sham state, sham riches,

sham everything — away from the world's eyes and those of Sebastian, into obscurity and poverty, which, she felt, would be no shams, but stern realities, with front of brass and eyes of stone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IRREVOCABLE.

'GOOD-BYE, Heywood, I wish you every success, and you carry the assurance of success in yourself. You will return to England a man of mark.'

'I trust never to return to England,' replied Myles, standing up in Sebastian's study, in the act of going. 'I am afraid it will seem ungracious to you when I say I don't care much about success. I want work; I don't care whether its successful or not. There's a verse in the Bible about "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" There may be many sorts of souls, don't you think so?'

'Yes, certainly. But I think time will soften these feelings of yours. Sometime you will find yourself wishing to return to England.'

Myles shook his head, with a half-smile, at once melancholy and sceptical. He ever wish to return to the place where Adrienne lived, Sebastian Mallory's wife! They had left the study, and gone to the hall door.

Straight before them, separated only by the garden and the dirty little river, was the broad, busy street—the beautiful building of the town hall rose through the dusk before them. Lights twinkled; feet and wheels sped rapidly past. As they paused, before the open door, the chimes rang out, clear and melodious; nine struck solemnly, and the old tune which haunted Myles, so interwoven was it with all the most sacred feelings of his life, was borne through the air in broken, fitful gusts of sound.

Sebastian heard it too.

'Take that as an omen,' said he, earnestly. 'The old poet, old Martin Usteri, in his

homely German town, touched a deeper truth when he wrote that little song of his, than all our present pessimistic sages put together can cram into their learned books. Don't forget the tune when you are away.

'I am not likely ever to forget it,' said Myles. 'Good-bye, and thank you. I cannot say more.'

With a pressure of the hand, he was gone, Sebastian heard his quick step along the gravel—then he heard the gate open, and swing to after him; and then Myles Heywood's form and footsteps were lost in the general rush along the busy street. Sebastian was left to listen to the last echoes of the chimes, and to hum softly to himself,—

'Freut Euch des Lebens,
Weil noch das Lämpchen glüht!
Pflücket die Rose,
Eh' sie verblüht.'

Myles was striding quickly homewards. In the hurry, preparation, and excitement of the last two days his mind had regained somewhat its vigour. It was not that he felt at

all happier, or satisfied, or contented—not that life appeared much brighter to him, only *it had to be lived.* He set that formula before his mind, and never allowed a doubt upon the subject to intrude, because he dared not. He felt that his only safe, his only reasonable course of action, was to press forward sternly and as rapidly as possible; to cast from him his old life like a worn-out coat, and begin the new one.

There was the prospect before him of life, struggle, striving, which he knew was worth a hundred of the lives he had been leading, which he knew it was his duty to accept and fulfil. The mere idea of it—of the difficulties to be overcome, and the possibilities to be attained—attracted him and braced him up, even while all he must leave seemed to grow dearer and more desirable as it was thrust farther into the background. There was no turning back now; a delay was what he most dreaded. He had grown a little grim and hard in his resolute pressing forward; even Mary fancied that he left them with a kind of

exultation, and grieved the more, even while she felt no surprise.

This evening he walked rapidly up the hilly street, 'for the last time,' he kept saying to himself, and hoping so too. How he had loved this prosaic, commonplace, dingy manufacturing town! What memories hung about it! Memories of a childhood spent amongst those he loved, of a youth and young manhood, which had not been without their honest, hearty struggles, strivings, and conquests, as well as their backslidings and failures; memories of a love which had grown upon him, stealing into his heart by such gentle, subtle degrees, that he could by no means define them—which love had become the master passion of his earnest heart, with heaven on its side, and chaos on the other. All this he had lived through in grimy, smoky Thanshope, with the everlasting roar of machinery as a sort of chorus; within sound of the melodious, chiming bells. His whole surroundings had ever been earnest and serious as his own thoughts and bent of mind,

and he felt that no other home would ever be harmonious to him as this was. Yet he was going to leave it all to-morrow, and his heart beat with a fierce gladness at the thought.

Occupied with such reflections as these, he found himself at his own door, and went into the house. Mary was in the kitchen. All her preparations lay neglected; she sat in her rocking-chair, with her hands before her, looking at nothing, her eyes wet with tears.

'What ails you, Molly?'

'Eh, you're there, Myles! Nothing ails me, except thinking o' what Miss Blisset's been talking about.'

'Miss Blisset!' he echoed in a gentle voice, pausing to look at her. 'Has she been here?'

'Ay, she has so! She only heard tell this morning about poor Ned, and she came down to say how sorry she were. Eh, but she is some and altered; hoo's gone so quiet, I ne'er saw nowt like it. Hoo were ne'er a noisy one, but now——'

Mary paused a minute.

'I'd a deal to tell her—all about me and Harry, and poor Ned, and about thy going away.'

'Yes,' said Myles, in a dull voice.

'Hoo fair started when hoo heard thou were going away. Hoo were so surprised. I told her all about it, and hoo said it were much the best thing, and I were to congratulate you. And then hoo said it were a long time since hoo had seen you, and, if you'd time, would you go up to-night and see her, for she'd something she wanted to say to you. If you do go,' added Mary, 'you'll have to go now, or it'll get too late. It's after nine.'

'I don't think it would be anything very important,' said her brother, in a measured voice. 'And I have no time, either. I've a lot of things to do to-night.'

'Won't you go?' asked Mary, opening her eyes wide. 'Not go and say good-bye to her! Such friends as you've been!'

'No,' repeated Myles. 'She will understand that I am too busy.'

'I don't think hoo'll understand nowt o' t'

sort,' said Mary, very emphatically. 'But go thy own gait; thou knows best.'

He turned away from her, and went upstairs to nail up a box with some books of his own in it, and to put up some few things of furniture which Mary was to take away with her when she went to the Ashworths' house, and as he worked, his heart and his temples throbbed almost to bursting.

Go to her, after what had been said! And, never to mention that, why was he to go to her? To hear something she wanted to tell him! What could that be, but that she was going to marry Sebastian? He was to walk up and hear that from her own lips, and then say good-bye to her, and not betray himself! After what had happened! After he had gone through with his bitter task, accepted favours from Sebastian—all in order that he might never see her again! No! Of course it might be ungrateful, brutal, uncivilised; it was, nevertheless, the only safe path for him to take—to maintain absolute silence, and let her think what she pleased of him.

What did it matter? She had Sebastian. He would soon be forgotten; he would take care of that. He knew, he was perfectly conscious all the time, that he was doing wrong. As he drove one nail after another into the box, each stroke of the hammer seemed to say, 'Wrong!' And, with his eyes open, he did that wrong, because he was utterly miserable, and, for the moment, utterly indifferent; because he had suffered so much and so long, that even his will felt broken, and to deliberately go to her and court still more suffering was more than he could do.

The theory of the freedom of the will, says the latest philosophy, is nonsense, and worse than nonsense. If we seriously follow out such an idea, it leads us into a mad confusion —an insane chaos of impossibilities piled on impossibilities. We have no power to will this or that; we have the power of following and obeying the strongest motives, and acting upon them. It was in strict accordance with this principle that Myles behaved in

this crisis of his fate : he followed and obeyed the strongest motives—he stayed at home.

Soon after eight the next morning he left. Later on the same day, Mr. Hoyle, hearing of the disappearance of Frederick Spenceley, was perforce reminded of the words of the preacher, and learnt practically that he had wrought in vain ; that, truly, all was vanity.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAWN OF NEW DAYS.

IT was August; the second August since that memorable one in 1862. This year, that of 1864, was in many respects a remarkable one in the annals of commerce, more especially in that branch of it known as the cotton trade.

Strange events had been witnessed; amongst others, a wondering world had looked on at the great 'scare' which took place amongst the cotton lords, when the first mistaken rumours of peace were spread. The members of a trade whose greatest friend, it

might have been supposed, would be peace, turned pale and trembled when peace was mentioned, and actually wished for the continuance of war; some of them saying that for them the alternative was war or ruin. Things grew somewhat more sane and better balanced, later; but the fact remained, that for once a great industry had seriously inclined her ear unto warlike councils, and had sought therein her profit. Despite all drawbacks, however, this last mighty daughter of civilisation was slowly arousing, and shaking off the paralysis which oppressed her. She stretched her huge limbs, and found that there was still life and vigour in them. Factories were being re-opened on every side, and amongst those which were again working full time, was that of Sebastian Mallory.

He sat breakfasting one Friday morning, alone, opening his letters, and with the unopened newspapers beside him. He usually breakfasted alone, now, and had grown quite accustomed to it. Mrs. Mallory rather avoided his society, and he, when he thought

about the matter at all, felt the absence to be a relief rather than otherwise.

Two years may or may not make a great change both in the character and appearance of a man. Sebastian Mallory was somewhat altered in the latter respect since he had parted from Myles Heywood one evening, which, when he thought of it, seemed a long time ago. His face had taken an older, more decided expression; his lips were more firmly closed; his eyes had lost much of their listlessness. He had found plenty of work ready to his hand, and he was not one of those persons whose work decreases. Business accumulated about him. People had discovered that he was useful, capable, and impartial. He did not know himself how great his influence was, or rather, he had not known it until a few days before, when, to his great surprise, he had been asked to contest the borough in the Radical interest, so soon as a vacancy should occur. He had promised to take the matter into consideration. In a few days his answer was to be given. He was

not wont to waver or vacillate; generally he could sum up the reasons for and against a course, and decide in the most prudent and reasonable way. On this occasion he had not found the matter so easily disposed of. 'He would, and he would not.' Many considerations urged him to accept; he could scarcely assign any for declining. The only one which would have been valid—that he felt no desire for a public life, and no wish to increase his present occupations — was absent. He had often felt a strong inclination for such a life; and he knew that he could manage to give time enough to it. The core of the matter was, that his heart was not in it. As he read his letters this morning, he thought of the coming interview with his supporters, and had an odd sensation that he absolutely did did not know what to say to them, and that it was a case which might appropriately be settled by tossing up.

He laid two of his letters on one side, until the business communications were disposed of, and then he took one of them up.

They both bore the Prussian stamp of two and a half groschen, and both were addressed in a German handwriting. He took up the first of them, with a slight smile hovering about his lips, or ever he began to read.

'DEAR SEBASTIAN,' it began.

'What an age it is since I heard from you! I look out fervently every day for the postman, and he never comes. I suppose you are *busy!* How completely changed you are, you who never used to be busy. I am writing this at the midnight hour, because I have news for you. Good news, of course; if it were bad news, I should leave it to travel to you on its own legs. Old Biermann, the *Direktor*, and I have, so to speak, buried the tomahawk, and sworn an alliance; and he is going to give my little cantata, *Hermann u. Dorothea*, at the next concert but one. This is a great step in advance. I hardly know what has induced him to be so gracious; but his word is given now, and let him repent him never so much, he will be obliged to carry it out. I

need not tell you, however, that I look upon it only as a step, and that my hopes and wishes continue to turn always to the opera. I am not hurrying about it, because I want it to be worth hearing when it is done. Mozart was only eighteen when his first opera (it's true it was a comic one) was produced, and I am nearly twenty.

'I am in luck's way, too. I have earned ten pounds by my own exertions, teaching, in the last six months. It is spread out before me in a beautiful shining row. No money ever looked so charming before. Please remember this, and make your next remittance ten pounds less than usual, or else I shall not feel as if I had really earned it.

'I cannot give you any news, for there is none; still, I will tell you what happened to me the other day. I was walking in the *Hofgarten*, when I met a lady walking alone. I looked up, and I thought: "Helena Spenceley! How did she come here?" In the surprise of the moment, I did not look at her attentively enough, but raised my cap, held

out my hand, and was going to accost her, when she smiled and uttered a rather astonished "*Mein Herr*, you are mistaken!" She was German, and when she smiled I saw the difference; she had not Helena's fire and spirit, and yet the likeness was wonderful. The incident set me thinking about those old days. You never mention Helena now. Do you never see her? Tell me when you write. I have never seen any one like her. I suppose you are too busy to think of such things. I used to wonder at your coolness all the time that she was suffering so, in consequence of that wicked father and brother of hers. I used to make her, in my own mind, the heroine of a hundred tragedies and romances, in those days. And yet—forgive me for saying so, I have always said things I ought not to say to you—I was nothing to her but an enthusiastic boy, to whom she was kind, and you were a great deal—a man—I believe *the* man. Since I met that lady in the gardens, I have thought a great deal about it, and as I found a little poem the other day called *Hélène*, I com-

posed an air for it, and made it into a song; but I shall not sell it. You may have it if you like; but I shall not send it until I hear from you.

'Ever your devoted

'HUGO.'

Sebastian put the letter down, the smile fading from his face. The meeting with a strange girl, a passing likeness, had set Hugo's memory working; had prompted him to write words which seemed striking to Sebastian. He had thought, more than once—often—of Helena Spenceley, but he had never seen her since, with disasters falling thick upon her young head, she, with her mother, had left Thanshope. They had gone to Manchester, he had heard. Once or twice he had asked his mother if she had not heard from Helena, for he remembered that Mrs. Mallory had told him how Helena had been a 'kind of daughter' to her; but she had composedly answered, 'no,' and had added that she did not know their address, and had reason to

think they did not wish to keep up any of their old Thanshope acquaintances, which, she feelingly added, was really very natural under the circumstances. At the time of their departure, business had pressed upon Sebastian, as it had continued to press upon him ever since. He had been smarting under the disappointment of his refusal by Adrienne. Helena and her misfortunes had touched him deeply; her calmness and the real heroism with which she met her fate, had impressed him. He had firmly intended that he should not be one of the Thanshope acquaintances whom they dropped entirely; but, by some means, they had slipped out of his ken, and he had not been able to find them again. Yet, many a time, Helena's beautiful face had seemed to start up before his eyes, at strange moments: sometimes when he was most busy, sometimes when he was in one of his rare idle moods. Sometimes a song or a strain of music would summon up the vision; sometimes in a busy street, or in a silent hour, it

would hover before him. This morning, after reading Hugo's letter, he saw it more strongly than ever; but, with the strength of will which belongs to daylight and activity, he thrust it away, and took up his other letter.

It was from his old friend, Herr Süsmeyer, who asked him if he was never coming to see him again, and added that he expected his son home sometime during the autumn, to take his place in the business. There were further domestic details, and then the remark, 'Young Heywood, whom you sent here to me, is my right hand, now that I am somewhat laid up; but he has been invaluable ever since he fairly mastered the language. I should like to speak to you about him, too. There will have to be some change when Julius returns.'

'Julius will return, will he?' murmured Sebastian to himself. 'And Heywood is invaluable. He has gained the old man's affections, and has not hardened his heart against him, or indeed against any one but me. But I know the reason, and can forgive

him. It is an old story now. Still, if ever I had the chance, I should like to test once again his feelings, and see if he is as stiff-necked as ever.'

He put the letters into his pocket-book, and, having finished breakfast, took his way to his office, pondering as to whether it would be possible for him to get a brief holiday sometime during the autumn, run over to Eisendorf, see Herr Süsmeyer, and observe with his own eyes how 'young Heywood' was getting on; then go on to where Hugo was studying, and carry him off with him to—Italy, perhaps, or Switzerland. He began to long all at once that he might be able to do so; and to yearn, almost, for the sound of Hugo's voice; to feel a sudden weariness of this grey, dismal town—this never-ending strife with starvation, this strained suspense, this sensation of standing on the brink of a precipice, which had been present with him, as it was with most men in his position, during all those troubled years. The last two of them he had fought out alone: to-day,

for the first time, he felt the battle weary and monotonous—almost ignoble.

'Please, sir,' said Ben, who still retained his place in the office, as Sebastian entered it, 'there's a message from Mr. Sutcliffe to say he's very poorly this morning, and can't come. He's very sorry, and he hopes he'll be better to-morrow.'

'Ill, is he?' said Sebastian, going into his private room. Mr. Sutcliffe had often been ill lately, and when he came to his work, he walked feebly and coughed a good deal.

'That's another question that must be settled, and before long too,' reflected Mr. Mallory, a shade of care upon his brow, when he found himself alone. 'I must have a serious talk with Sutcliffe, but how I'm to manage to make him have assistance, and yet take the same salary, I don't know. He is so confoundedly conscientious.'

After working doubly hard, in order to make up for Mr. Sutcliffe's absence, Sebastian found himself, shortly after eleven o'clock, in the train on his way to Manchester, Tuesday

and Friday being the market-days in that city: the days when merchants in the streets most do congregate, and when that impressive spectacle, High 'Change, is won't to be even more imposing than usual.

It was a busy day. Sebastian, after going on 'Change and visiting his Manchester office, made certain business calls, and, in the middle of the afternoon, found himself standing in Mosley Street, exactly opposite the Royal Institution.

It was a hot, close, Manchester afternoon. Scarcely a breath of air was stirring. The smoke pressed heavily down upon the thick, yellow air. Faintly the coppery sunbeams tried to struggle through it, and wavered, and seemed to fail. There was a roar and a din in the much-frequented street—all about the great black, grimy-looking buildings, shops, offices, and warehouses. Omnibuses, carts, and lorries were struggling in a 'lock' in the middle of the street, and two exhausted-looking policemen were trying to restore order. Sebastian's next destination was over the

way; but, surveying the scene before him, he saw no immediate prospect of getting over the way, and turned round towards the Royal Institution, as if to consult that building as to what he had better do.

Three large boards, covered with placards, caught his eye. 'Exhibition of Pictures,' in large letters, stood at the top of the boards, while profuse details followed in smaller print below:

'The pictures! Why not go in, and have a look?' he reflected, and straightway walked up to the door, paid his shilling, secured a catalogue, and ran up the steps.

It was between three and four in the afternoon. If it had been sultry out of doors, it was much more so within. The rooms felt stiflingly hot, and the blaze of colour upon the walls was oppressive. There were not very many visitors present, and those who had come were going languidly round. The people who had secured seats upon the chairs or divans looked nearly asleep, and those who had not secured such seats were looking envi-

ously at those who had, as if, with a little more provocation, they would forget conventionality and sit down on top of them.

Sebastian glanced critically around. Now and then a picture caught his eye and partially pleased it, but these were few and far between; and he passed rather quickly from one room to another, until he came to the end one of all, which was devoted to water-colours. The first object that met his eye was an empty chair, and he promptly sat down upon it. On examining the wall before him, he found that one oil-painting had been admitted amongst the water-colours, and that it was hung exactly opposite to him. He sat in rapt contemplation of it, feebly endeavouring to guess what it was meant to represent. A drab-coloured lady crouched together, nursing one of her own feet. She was scantily attired, also in drab, and had a peculiar cast of countenance, and an imbecile smile, showing rows of very fine teeth, and was glancing upwards. She was adorned with ropes of pearls of a size and value which must have surprised even the

author of 'Lothair,' could he have seen them. An opaque veil prevented the colour of her hair from being seen. She was drab; the stones of the palace-steps upon which she reposed were likewise drab. The sand of the banks, the water of the river flowing by, were all drab. Sebastian studied the composition, and shook his head, referring in despair to his catalogue. 'Cleopatra by the Nile, by ——. Price, one hundred guineas.' If a little green ticket stuck in the margin of the frame were to be believed, this work of genius was sold.

'Some fellows do have most awful strokes of luck,' mused Sebastian. 'Now, the man who painted this thing—I wonder if he knew how the chances were against his ever sell—'

'You shan't!'

'I shall! I tell you I shall have that picture; it's mine. I like that little pussy. Mayn't I have that little pussy, Miss Spenceley?'

'Well, no, dear, I'm afraid not, unless you can persuade papa to buy it; because, you see, we can't take the things away.'

'But I will have it! I want that little pussy for my own!' And a howl followed.

'Oh, hush, Jacky dear! What shall we do if the man comes to turn us out? Come here! We'll ask papa about the pussy, shall we?'

Sebastian started from his chair, heat, listlessness, 'Cleopatra by the Nile,' and everything else forgotten, and turned suddenly round. The group was behind him, close to him—yes, he knew that figure again instantly, even in its present shabbiness, compared with its former splendour. She was bending over an urchin of four or five summers, whose engaging countenance was ominously puckered up in readiness for another burst of infantile music. Two other children, a girl and a boy, both older than the would-be possessor of the pussy-cat, stood by, wrangling with each other as to the possession of another work of art. She still did not turn her face in his direction, but Sebastian, with an eagerness and a pleasure which surprised even himself, exclaimed very audibly:

'Miss Spenceley, have you forgotten me? Won't you look at me?'

She started violently from her stooping attitude, and, leaving the recalcitrant Jacky to his fate, at last turned to him.

'Mr. Mallory, I—I—how you surprised me!' she stammered, looking at first so pale and startled that he was surprised.

He was shocked too, after the first glance, at the change, the sad, mournful change, in her face.

'You do know me again,' he said; 'at least you might shake hands with me. I fear you are not pleased to renew our acquaintance.'

He had taken her hand, and as his fingers touched hers, Helena's paleness fled, and crimson dyed her cheeks. Tears rushed to her eyes; her lips opened, but she did not speak. His eyes were still fixed upon her face; he could not remove them; he did not realise that his prolonged gaze distressed her. He felt unaccountably glad to meet her, pleased, excited, light-hearted, as if he had a great deal to say to her and ask her. He forgot all

about his engagements—about returning to the station, or going home; he wanted to talk to her, to hear her speak, to find out all about her.

The colour gradually died out of her cheeks, and then became again apparent the change these two years had wrought in her. She was thin, decidedly thin, compared with the full if delicate beauty of past days; there were hollows in her cheeks and under her great dark eyes. There was a painful line about her lips, and a melancholy, which looked as if it were settled, in her expression. She looked, what he had never thought she could look, patient and subdued—not the impulsive, fiery-hearted girl whom he had known and teased and quarrelled with.

Her dress, he also saw, was sadly altered. Helena had always had a weakness for splendid things: she delighted in a rich colour, a soft silk, a sheeny satin—in all kinds of luxurious, and beautiful, and fashionable things. Formerly people used to laugh at this weakness. Other girls, whose fathers had not been so

rich as Mr. Spenceley, used to turn up their noses, and say that she was vulgarly ostentatious; that it was exceedingly bad taste in a girl to dress herself as splendidly as a dowager, and so on. In truth, it had been no bad taste at all. The splendour was part of her nature —one phase of her individuality; it belonged to her as much as her queenly shape and melodious voice.

But now—there was no splendour in that dress, of poor material and last year's fashion. The silk mantle had been handsome once—perhaps it was a relic of palmier days; now its shape was antiquated, and it was too good for the poorness of the rest of the toilette. The glove on the hand, which Sebastian still continued to hold, had been often mended. Helena looked what she used to have the strongest objection to—poor, shabby, and unprosperous, her good looks faded——

But not gone. No. Sebastian, staring on in the same rude and reprehensible manner, satisfied himself that her beauty was only clouded over, not vanished.

'Do you know, I have been thinking about you a great deal to-day?' he said. 'I had a letter this morning from Hugo von Birkenau: he saw a German lady in the gardens at ——, and thought it was you. Just fancy! He made all sorts of inquiries about you. How fortunate that I happened to look in this afternoon!'

Helena seemed to have nothing to reply. Her face was still downcast; she remained silent.

'It is nearly two years since we met,' he urged; 'and yet you do not say you are glad to see me.'

'Oh, I am! Very glad,' murmured Helena.

'You live in Manchester still?'

'Yes; mamma and I. We live in Woodford Street, ——.'

She named one of the southern suburbs of Manchester.

'Do you? That is not far away. How odd that we should never have met!'

'I don't think so. Woodford Street is not a fashionable locality.'

'Is it not? I must remember the name. I asked my mother where you lived, but she said she did not know the address. But now that we have met, I am sure you will allow me to call, will you not?'

'Our house is so very small; we have so few visitors,' she began, in some embarrassment.

'But, my dear Miss Spenceley, you do not seriously mean that you could urge that as an objection,' he exclaimed. 'You are pleased to chaff me, I think, as you used to do.'

Helena turned abruptly away; her lips set; her eyes fixed upon a water-colour drawing immediately before them.

'Do you mean that you really would rather I did not come?' he asked earnestly, and excessively piqued at the idea.

'If you really wish to come,' said Helena, rather proudly, 'of course we shall be happy to see you, but I am sure you will find it very inconvenient. I am engaged until after four o'clock, and mamma——'

'Until after four? I shall remember that.

The evenings are long now, and there are trains going to Thanshope till midnight, you know. How is Mrs. Spenceley?'

'She is very well, thank you.'

'Have you been bringing these young people to see the pictures?' he inquired, for something in Helena's manner forbade him to make the eager personal inquiries which crowded to his lips.

Now that the first shock and surprise of meeting him again had passed, and she had recovered her self-possession, there was a certain pride and distance of bearing which seemed to require considerable deference on his part. Helena's troubles had indeed made her into a woman: she had most decidedly quitted the girlish stage. She had probably, thought Sebastian, become a great deal more reasonable, and consequently a great deal less amenable to the influence of other persons—Miss Mereweather, for instance, and himself too. With regard to Miss Mereweather, it might be a matter of rejoicing that Helena had forsworn her tenets, but

with regard to himself, perhaps that was not altogether delightful.

'Yes,' said Helena calmly, as she looked at the three children, 'I have. They are my pupils.'

'Are they good?'

'I fancy they are as good as their parents will allow them to be. It all depends upon that.'

'How so?' asked Sebastian. Anything to prolong the conversation!

'Mr. and Mrs. Galloway are supplied with the newest ideas upon all subjects, education included. The new education theory is, that when children are allowed their own way, they always do right; or if they do wrong, some one else is to blame for it. That is why I say they are as good as their parents will allow them to be.'

'And are you generally the "some one else" who is to blame?' he asked, wishing very much that she would utter some complaint, afford him some chance of offering sympathy or expressing fellow-feeling.

'Oh, no!' she replied, quite cheerfully. 'I

only come in for my share, and they really are very fond of me; only they show it in rather a funny way. That is why I can't see any one before four o'clock. I leave them then—reluctantly, of course,' she added, with a smile which vexed Sebastian, because he could not tell whether it was feigned or not; 'but still, I leave them.'

'Won't you sit down in this chair?' he said reproachfully, 'and tell me all about yourself?' He moved the chair forward for her, for he saw that she looked tired, and indeed she was very tired, and Sebastian looked to her wearied eyes, so kind, so handsome, and so agreeable, that it was with difficulty she maintained her little air of dignified reserve; but the voice within was a powerful one: 'What right has he to look at me in that gentle, reproachful way, as if he, and not poor mamma and I, had been neglected? It is impertinent, and I won't submit to it.'

'No, thank you,' she said aloud, looking at her watch. 'It is time to go. We must take a Victoria Park omnibus, and it will pass in

three minutes. Come, children! Jacky, Amy, Ted! we must go.'

They came obediently enough. Their failing appearing to be in affection towards each other. They lavished affectionate epithets upon their governess, and quarrelled, as Helena said, 'because I have not three hands;' but they cast looks of suspicion upon each other, and took every opportunity of falling out.

'Good-afternoon!' said Helena to Sebastian, and, as the children crowded round her and clasped her hands, she was not displeased to see that his face fell. She was glad that he should see that she was not altogether an object of pity.

'I am going too,' he said. 'I will see you into the omnibus. It will save you a little trouble. Come, young lady, take hold of my hand, or you will tear Miss Spenceley to pieces.'

The little girl put her hand in his contentedly enough, merely informing her brothers that they were 'nasty, selfish things,' and the procession went downstairs.

As they stood on the top of the steps,

waiting for the omnibus, Sebastian, turning once more to Helena, said :

'You have not told me the number of your house. What is it?'

'Fifty-seven,' said Helena. 'Jacky, dear, if you pull Teddy's hair again I'll make you sit outside the omnibus.'

'Fifty-seven. Best make a note of it, for fear I should forget it,' he added, jotting it down, while Helena, with a brave assumption of indifference, looked straight before her, and choked back her tears.

'You are not engaged until four o'clock on Sundays, are you?' he suddenly asked.

'No—but—oh, don't come on Sunday!' said Helena, in her old tragic manner.

'I solemnly swear that I will not come on Sunday!' he said. 'And equally solemnly I swear I will make you tell me why I am forbidden to come on that day.'

'Why?' said Helena, with a kind of half-laugh, not quite free from an hysterical sound, 'why, the reason is simple enough. Because——'

The omnibus is almost more relentless in its punctuality than time and tide. Not another word could be exchanged. They ran down the steps, and went through the ignominious performance of hailing and catching the vehicle. Sebastian, with great presence of mind, did manage to clasp Helena's hand once more, and to repeat the words:

'I shall come soon, and *not* on Sunday.'

Then he stood in the middle of Mosley Street, gazing after the omnibus, until an uproar caused him to look up, and he found himself surrounded with infuriated lorry-drivers, swearing at him for getting into the way, while a hansom-cabman had just pulled his horse up on to its very haunches, and was apostrophising him in a manner the reverse of complimentary. Newspaper boys were jeering at him, and an indignant policeman was ordering him to move on.

With an amiable smile, and a murmured general apology, he made his way to the footpath, and then on to the station.

CHAPTER II.

FENCING.

TOWARDS five o'clock on the following Tuesday afternoon, a hansom cab drove rapidly up that Manchester thoroughfare known as Oxford Street, and the address given by the man who took it had been, 'Fifty-seven, Woodford Street.'

As they spun rapidly along, he looked out, wondering on which side of Oxford Street Woodford Street might lie; how far from town, and if it would turn out to be a very poor little street indeed. He remembered Helena's look of embarrassment, as she said the house was small and uncomfortable. They drove on; the cab passed the Owen's

College, passed the 'Church of the Holy Name,' passed some other buildings, and at last turned off to the right.

Sebastian shook his head. 'Not the best side. Poor little Helena!' Why did he always think of her as 'little Helena,' she who was taller than most women, and whose disdainful head, set upon her long white neck, had been wont to look over the heads of a good many even of the men of Thanshope? Three whole days had passed since he had met her in the Royal Institution—three whole days, and part of a fourth, because she had told him not to come on Sunday.

'Why wouldn't she let me come on Sunday?' he had asked himself many times, and had assigned all kinds of imaginary reasons for the prohibition. The latest was, 'Perhaps other people, or another person, may be allowed to come on Sunday. I shall make her tell me—if I can. I wonder if I can call one of those old flashing smiles to her face—one of those looks which ran over it,

and made it more beautiful still, if that could be?'

Lost in profound conjecture upon this subject, he forgot to look where they were going, until the cab had traversed several smallish streets, and at last pulled up suddenly before one of a row of moderately-sized houses —houses of the kind which would be called 'respectable.' It was not a glaring new street: it was neatly kept, and as he jumped out of the hansom and looked up it and down it, he did not see a single barrel-organ—not even a perambulator.

Neither of these things did he behold; but he saw Helena Spenceley herself, just coming up to the gate, walking rather wearily, and looking tired, as she pushed it open.

'She has been walking and I have been driving,' he thought, with a strange sensation of guiltiness, as he dismissed the man and joined her.

'You see, I have kept my word,' he observed. 'I have come soon, and I have not come on Sunday.'

'I am glad to see you,' said Helena sedately.

They were airing themselves all this time on the top of the doorsteps, Mrs. Spenceley's domestic, or domestics, not seeming to be in any violent hurry to open the front door; but as Sebastian was about to make some further observation, it was suddenly flung (as much as such a modestly-proportioned door could be flung) wide open, by a young man whose appearance seemed to indicate that he belonged to some one of the numerous tribes of clerks.

When he saw them he recoiled a step or two, and Sebastian, to his great amusement, saw that he was honoured by the surprised young gentleman, with a scowl of peculiar malevolence. Clearing his brow, after a moment, of this unbecoming expression, he addressed himself to Helena.

'Good-afternoon, Miss Spenceley. I hope I see you well.'

'Very well, thank you. Will you allow me to pass?'

'You see, I am somewhat earlier to-day;

in fact, two hours earlier than usual. I was, if I must tell the truth, on my way to meet *you*,' with great emphasis upon the personal pronoun, and a languishing, but fascinating smile.

'To meet *me*?' repeated Helena, with equal emphasis; 'pray, on what errand, Mr. Jenkins?'

'I thought, as the evening was so beautiful, you might possibly not be indisposed for a—a —little walk, after tea, of course; and if so, I——'

'I am obliged, but I am engaged this evening, and I *never* take walks after tea,' said Helena, with crushing coldness. 'If you will kindly allow us to pass——'

Mr. Jenkins, plunging his hand into his breast, flattened himself against the wall, and resumed the Giaour-like scowl, as Sebastian followed Helena. She opened the door of a back room, and invited him in.

'I am afraid you will find it rather hot,' said she; 'these little houses are so thin, you know. They let the heat in, and then it

never seems to get out again, you know. Take that chair,' and she seated herself languidly upon another. 'It is our only sitting-room,' she added, drawing off her gloves, and speaking deliberately, as she looked fixedly at Sebastian, to see how he would take her announcement. 'It is dining and drawing room, morning-room, boudoir and library. At Castle Hill we had them separately, but here mamma lets the rest of her rooms to lodgers. Mr. Jenkins, who wanted me to go for a walk with him, was one of them.'

'I see,' said Sebastian tranquilly. 'I also saw that I did not rise in his esteem from the fact that I deprived him of his walk.'

'Mr. Mallory!' exclaimed Helena indignantly, as she lost the languid look and suddenly sat upright, 'do you insult me by supposing that I *ever* take my walks abroad with that horrid, presuming little man? But why should you not suppose so?' she added with a little laugh.

'I supposed nothing,' said Sebastian. 'I

only saw that he looked very much disappointed, and I could quite sympathise with him.'

Here he ventured to look at Helena with some meaning in his glance, but was met by a direct gaze of what seemed to him cheerful, blank indifference—a gaze which chilled him; for Helena's looks and glances had suddenly risen to a place of high importance in his mind. Their interview on Friday, especially the first few minutes of it, haunted him. He could not forget her agitation, nor how she had turned, first pale, and then red as a rose, on meeting him. He had wondered, and had determined to find out, what the agitation meant. He had thought it would be quite easy. The Helena whom he had known in former days had not been adroit in concealing her feelings, but before the present young lady he was obliged to own himself baffled. Her appearance, attitude, expression, was languid and weary; she looked worn, and not very happy, but her manner was composed, and a little hard in its ostentatious cheerful-

ness. He could not tell what was real and what assumed, and the desire to find out, to break down the reserve, to conquer, in short, his besetting foible, grew very strong indeed.

'Can you drink tea at five o'clock?' pursued Helena. 'We have ours at five. Teaching makes me thirsty, and mamma likes her tea at five. Remember, there is no dinner to follow after.'

'If you invite me to tea, I am sure I shall be delighted to stay.'

'Then you are invited. Now I must go and take off my things. I will try to find mamma. You will excuse our leaving you alone for a short time.'

'Pray don't mention it,' said Sebastian, and Helena left the room. It was not a lofty room; the doorway was decidedly low, and he thought she would have to stoop to pass under it.

When he was left alone he glanced round the room. It was rather small, and was overfilled with furniture. Books were scattered

about, and in the most shady corner of the room there was a vase containing a carefully-preserved nosegay, such as might be bought for a trifle at any greengrocer's shop in the neighbourhood. Everything was exquisitely neat and orderly, and in little touches here and there he fancied he recognised Helena's hand, despite the plainness, and, in some respects, even poorness of the furniture. On the mantelpiece he detected two little vases of Sèvres—relics of former splendour, no doubt. There was no piano, he noticed that. Perhaps because it would have filled up the room too much, or perhaps because pianos were rather expensive things to buy or hire. Yet Helena used to sing, and had a very fresh, sweet voice. How well he remembered her on that evening when he had first seen her—in her beauty and splendour, in her costly dress and sparkling necklace and rings. She had sung, 'Since first I saw your face.'

That seemed a very long time ago!

He hoped it would not be long before Helena came down again. He hoped Mrs.

Spenceley would not sit with them all the evening, and he hoped they would not expect him to go away very early.

Presently the door was opened, and, not Helena, but her mother came in. Sebastian was as much struck with the change in her as he had been shocked with that in Helena, but in a different way. Mrs. Spenceley looked better, happier, younger, and more contented, than she had done since her husband had made his fortune eighteen years ago. And she looked so because she was so. She did not mind the narrow means, the small house, the two servant-girls, and the constant necessity for her presence in the kitchen. All that was as the breath of life to her, and she thoroughly enjoyed it. Sebastian, with a sigh of relief, felt that here no condolences were needed, no delicate skirting of dangerous ground. He might look cheerful, and ask Mrs. Spenceley with confidence and success how she was. The nature of her answer was visibly written upon her face beforehand.

'Well, Mr. Mallory, this is a pleasure! I

could scarcely believe it when Helena said she had met you, and you were coming to see us. I said, "Eh, he'll never come, not he!" But she said she thought you would; and she's right, it seems.'

'She certainly is. I am very glad to see you looking so well, Mrs. Spenceley.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Mrs. Spenceley, lightly flinging a purple satin cap-string over her shoulder. 'I've nothing to complain of, thank God! I've got on much better than I'd any reason to expect, and I'm thankful for it. It's hard work sometimes, but I've a broad back.'

Which she certainly had.

'That is very fortunate,' he said, with becoming solemnity.

'Yes; I've four gentlemen. You'd wonder where we find room to put them all, but the house is more capacious' (Sebastian conjectured that she meant spacious) 'than it looks, and we've room for them all. Very nice gentlemen they are too; all in business in Manchester, you know. They're quiet and

well-behaved, and they pay up regularly; and,' she added, dropping her voice, 'none of your stand-off gents. They are all disposed to be most friendly, all except Mr. Harrison, and he's engaged to his cousin, who lives in Northumberland. He hears from her regularly, twice a week.'

'Yes,' said Sebastian, with an air of the deepest interest—the air of one thirsting for more information.

'But all the others—Mr. Finlay, and Mr. Smithson, and Mr. Jenkins—are most friendly, and quite gentlemen, every one of them. Indeed Mr. Jenkins,' she dropped her voice again, 'is very much interested in Helena.'

'Is he?' said Sebastian, still with unfeigned interest.

'Yes, he is. He's getting on, too. And a perfect gentleman—on Sundays'—Sebastian leaned eagerly forward—'on Sundays they often go out into the country for the day, or sometimes even for the week-end; but Mr. Jenkins, never,' said Mrs. Spenceley emphatically; 'Mr. Jenkins dines with *us*.'

'*Poor* Helena!' thought Sebastian, while he said, 'Oh, indeed!'

'Helena said I oughtn't to have entered into such an arrangement; but I think she's mistaken, and I think she'll come to see her mistake in time.'

'Miss Spenceley does not feel so much interest in Mr. Jenkins, perhaps, as he feels in her!'

'That I can't say; but if she does, she conceals it, which is but natural after all.'

'Quite natural in such a case,' assented Sebastian.

'Here's the tea-things,' continued Mrs. Spenceley cheerfully, producing a bunch of keys, and going to a cupboard, whence she drew forth, to speak metaphorically, flagons wherewith to stay her guest, and apples for his comfort—in the dry language of reality, a jar of apple-jelly, and a glass dish containing conserves of a deeper, more sanguinary hue.

While Mrs. Spenceley was half-buried in the depths of the cupboard, Helena came into the room again. She had changed her dress,

and attired herself in another relic of splendour, a black silk dress, rich and handsome, if somewhat old-fashioned; and she had tied an orange-coloured ribbon round her neck, and put on a little lace frill, and Sebastian felt that she looked lovely, and began to hate those three gentlemen who were disposed to be so very friendly, with a deadly hatred. Her eyes fell upon the figure of her mother, half in and half out of the cupboard. It was a very funny sight, and when she turned to Sebastian, there was a broad smile of amusement upon her face. It looked as if it was the first that had been there for a very long time, and Sebastian felt it only right to smile as genially in return.

Mrs. Spenceley, emerging from the cupboard, summoned them to the table; Sebastian felt as if it were a dream, as he handed Helena her chair, and took his place opposite her. No surroundings, however poor, could take away from the queenly beauty of her face and figure. She was indeed more queenly than she ever had been before, he thought, as he

watched her across that simple board. The meal was soon over, and then Mrs. Spenceley, rising, said:

'Mr. Mallory, you must excuse me if I leave you. I must first go and see about their teas, and then I've promised to go and sit with Mrs. Woodford, next door but one. She's a great friend of mine. Her husband's father built most of the houses in this street, and was a rich man, but he never could keep anything, never! and now she pays a rent for the very house her father-in-law built. This world's full of ups and downs.'

'It is indeed. Then I shall not see you again this evening?'

'Well, no. We shall most likely have a little supper together, and so I shall leave Helena and you to have a little chat. But I shall hope to see you again soon, Mr. Mallory, if you don't mind coming all this way out of town.'

He hastened to assure her that he thought it a very nice drive, and not at all far; and Mrs. Spenceley, disturbed by the sound of a ring at the bell, said:

'There's Mr. Finlay! I must go. Good-evening, Mr. Mallory.'

She was gone, and they were alone. Helena had taken her work-basket to a little table near the window, and had begun to embroider a little strip of muslin. Sebastian thought the sofa, which was just on the other side of the little table, offered a suitable place for the purposes of confidential conversation, and he went and sat down upon it.

'Is there no one in Thanshope about whom you wish to inquire, Miss Spenceley?' he began.

'I—oh, how rude of me! I have never asked after Mrs. Mallory. How is she?'

'She is very well, thank you.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Helena calmly; and Sebastian felt rather uncomfortable, for Mrs. Mallory had not displayed any interest in the Spenceley family since their downfall.

'Do you see much of the Thanshope people?' continued Helena, in the same calmly indifferent tone; not a resentful tone, but a politely conventional one, which was much more disagreeable

to Sebastian than a resentful one would have been. It implied that Thanshope and all that therein lived had become a name, a memory, a thing of the past to her. 'Do you visit much?' she added; 'go to many parties?'

'N—no. I am very busy. I am busy all day, and I don't care much for the Thanshope people. All my near friends, those in whom I took an interest, I have lost.'

'How very distressing! How has that come to pass?'

'Hugo von Birkenau has gone to Germany. He is studying music, and intends to make a profession of it. He has begun to give lessons already.'

'Hugo give lessons!' cried Helena, looking up surprised.

'Yes, I will tell you all about it another time. I see you don't half believe it. But it is true. We have not quarrelled, I am glad to say; but he has gone. He has begun life for himself, and henceforth our paths are divided. There was another. You did not know him. I could scarcely call him one of

my friends, but I miss him. He is one interest less. There was Mr. Blisset; he is dead. There was you—at least I hope so.'

'I don't think we ever were really friends. I did not like your opinions.'

'But not enemies?'

'Well, perhaps not exactly; at least, not at last,' said Helena, with a sudden change in her voice. 'But,' she repeated, 'I did not like your opinions. You shut me—I mean you denied to women the right to participate in those larger questions which I hold they ought to be interested in as well as men, for the sake both of men and of themselves; and I never would give in to that as long as I live.'

She did not speak vehemently, but with a decision and calmness unlike her old agitation of manner.

'I wonder how I shall ever make you understand my real views on that subject,' he said despairingly.

'You said you had no views on the question. Perhaps, if you had ever tried to find

out whether I had any understanding, you might have succeeded in discovering a tiny scrap, somewhere very low down. But never mind, it is of no consequence now. I can never help forward the questions I take an interest in, as I once hoped to do; so you need not be afraid of my going astray. I have lost the power.'

'Miss Spenceley——'

'I think you have forgotten one of your friends,' suggested Helena, with a change in her voice, which she could not quite conceal.

'Have I? Which?' he asked very meekly.

'Miss Adrienne Blisset.'

'Ah, yes! I actually had forgotten her. I never see her now, either.'

'Does she no longer live in Thanshope?' asked Helena, bending over her work.

'She still has Stonegate, but she is scarcely ever there. I think she has taken a dislike to the place. And when she is there, I do not see her. As you say, she is lost to me too, for we once were friends.'

Sebastian's voice did not change. It was

quite steady and composed. Helena still seemed interested in her work, as she said:

'I should think that must be the greatest loss of all to you.'

'In some respects it is. At first, it was a great loss. Now I feel it less. For two years I have been learning to live alone. Smile scornfully to yourself if you like! You may not believe me, but it is true, all the same.'

'Oh, I can believe that you found it hard to lose Miss Blisset's society. She was no ordinary young lady. If she had once been your friend, it must have been difficult to resign her. And people spoke of something more than friendship. I heard, often, that you and she were engaged.'

'Did you? I, too, have heard something of the same kind; but there was no truth in the report. We were never engaged.'

'Ah! people will talk, you see!'

'Naturally, but I don't think they talk so much anywhere as in Thanshope.'

'Perhaps they haven't so much cause.'

'That is rather too bad.'

'You mean that people are not often so rude to you. I can quite fancy so.'

'You will agree with me that I have lost all my friends.'

'You do not seem broken-hearted,' said Helena. 'You look well and cheerful.' She raised her eyes, and surveyed his face, straitly and composedly. Sebastian wished the look had not been so entirely self-possessed.

'I lead too busy a life to be broken-hearted,' he replied. 'Pray don't suppose that I spend my time in thinking how lonely I am.'

'I never supposed anything of the kind.'

'It is simply, that I once had friends, and circumstances removed them, and I have not been able to fill up their places. I have worked hard—really hard, and I think I have learnt some good lessons in these sad years.'

'Yes,' said Helena, looking up, with the old eager interest in her eyes, the old brightness upon her face. 'You must indeed have learned some lessons. My greatest trouble in leaving Thanshope was that I lost sight of

all my friends that I had made during the distress. I have had no interest like that since then. You have. And you have had other interests too. I saw that they had asked you to be the Radical candidate, when Mr. Lippincott resigned. There is a prospect before you! Have you given your answer yet?'

'My answer is due to-morrow. And upon my honour, I don't know what it is going to be. What would you advise?'

'Mr. Mallory!'

'Yes?'

'Why will you persist in saying such things? Do you think it is amusing?'

'According to you, I must have the most wonderful faculty of amusement that any man ever possessed. Please, do I think what amusing?'

'Do you think it amusing to ask questions of that kind? To solemnly ask advice when you don't want it? To consult a woman, and a young woman, upon an important step in life? We don't understand these things—at least you say so, and I choose to take you

at your word, so far as you are concerned. I do not choose to be treated as you once treated me, when I was in earnest, and then be appealed to, for an opinion. I have no opinion on the question.'

'I wish I had never opened my lips upon that question. You have never forgiven me, and you never will,' said he, in a deep tone of mortification. 'I too was in earnest when I asked you to-night what you advised. I have been vacillating, and considering and wondering what was best, like——'

'Like a woman.'

'Like a lonely man who has no counsellor to whom to apply.'

'How pathetic!'

'Will you really not give me one word of advice? Would you accept or not?'

'You do not want my advice. You—it is absurd! You have lots of men to advise you. What can you want my advice for?'

She spoke impatiently. Stung by her tone, words, and manner, he leaned suddenly forward, saying:

'I do want your advice, Helena. I acted like a consequential fool towards you at one time. When your troubles overtook you, I was made thoroughly ashamed of myself. You behaved like a heroine. Tell me, should I accept or refuse? Give me your opinion, and, by Heaven, I will abide by it! I can trust you.'

'Then accept! With your abilities and your responsibilities, you have no right to refuse.'

'I shall accept,' was all he said, and there was silence for a time.

Helena went on working, with how great, how immense an effort, he could not know. He sat and meditated on what he had done, on the fact that he had submitted his conscience to the guidance of a girl's voice, and that since that voice had spoken, every hesitation, every doubt had vanished. Not a difficulty remained.

'You will be almost certainly elected,' said Helena after a pause. 'Then your life will be busier than ever. How will you manage?'

'That is a problem which is even now troubling me. I must have some help. I do not know where to turn for it. I am overwhelmed with business, really.'

'Are you? I wonder at you wasting your precious hours here,' said Helena; and the moment after she had said it, her face became crimson.

'You think the time wasted, and you wonder that I should waste it here?' said Sebastian, and looked at her steadily.

Helena did, at this point, show a return of her former sensibility. The flush remained high in her cheeks. Her eyes fell, and her hand trembled as she resumed her work. Sebastian was much too good a tactician to lessen the value of the sign he had wrung from her, by coming to her assistance with any casual remark. He remained perfectly silent, till Helena, apparently finding the situation disturbing, started up, exclaiming impatiently:

'How hot it is! Oh, how hot! My needle gets sticky, and I can't work with a sticky

needle. . . . When you are elected—and you are sure to be elected—you will, as you say, be very busy; but what an interesting kind of business! I shall often think——'

She stopped suddenly.

'Never mind my life,' said he, beginning to see where the power on his side, and the weakness on hers, really lay. 'Tell me something about your own.'

'About mine—my life!' said Helena, with a little laugh. 'That would indeed be an exciting history—too much for your nerves altogether, I fear.'

'Tell me, or I shall not know how to think of you. It is so annoying not to know the tenor of the life led by some person in whom one takes an interest. What is the name of the parents of your pupils?'

'Their name is Galloway.'

'What sort of people are they?'

'They are rich people.'

'That is nothing to the point.'

'They are people with fads, and yet they are very kind to me. I teach their children

—as much as they will allow me, that is. They believe in letting the children grow up happy, and never punishing them, which means——' Helena smiled.

'Which means that every one else, and you particularly, are to grow up unhappy, and live in a state of eternal punishment,' said Sebastian resentfully; 'disgusting people!'

'They are not disgusting, and they have a right to bring up their children as they think best.'

Sebastian found that Helena would not complain. She evidently accepted the inevitable resolutely. She had become very reasonable and sensible. He wished she had been less so.

'Mrs. Spenceley looks well and cheerful, said he at last. 'That must be a comfort to you.'

'Poor mamma! Yes, it is,' said Helena, with sudden tenderness. 'What a great deal she has had to go through, and how brave, and cheerful, and uncomplaining she is! She makes me feel ashamed of myself, and yet I

cannot see things in the light in which she sees them.'

'Mr. Jenkins, for instance, on Sundays.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Helena; and then, after a pause, 'No; mamma and I differ very much on the subject of Mr. Jenkins.'

'You see, I know why I may not come on Sunday,' said he, rising.

'Do you? I thought you would not enjoy Mr. Jenkins' society, but now, if you like, you may come on Sunday and have the pleasure of meeting him. We are glad to see our friends, if they care to visit us.'

'Our *friends!*' It was the turn of the eminently reasonable Mr. Mallory to feel most unreasonably annoyed at being classed, along with Mr. Jenkins, as 'our friends.' Helena had succeeded in turning the tables very completely upon him. It was useless to try not to feel mortified and snubbed. He felt both; and Helena stood, the picture of unconscious innocence, waiting for him to finish his good-bye.

'You have changed, Miss Spenceley,' said

he. 'You have developed the power of being very——'

'Rude and unkind?' suggested Helena. 'Perhaps adversity has soured my temper. It has that effect upon many natures, and I never was one who could endure thwarting, as you may remember.'

'May I be allowed to come again?' he asked almost humbly.

'We shall be happy to see you, whenever your other engagements allow you to call,' said Helena quite coolly and distantly. The answer chilled him and stung him, and yet, he asked himself, what more would he have had her say?

'You say you are so very busy,' she continued remorselessly, 'and if you accept this invitation to stand, and if Mr. Lippincott resigns, which I suppose he really intends to do now, and the election comes on, your time will indeed be fully occupied.'

'But I am not forbidden to come, when I have time?'

'Forbidden! Oh, no! As I said, we are always glad to see our friends.'

'Good-bye,' said he. 'Remember you are answerable for the step I am going to take.'

'You say so, but I wonder how it would have been if we had never met,' said Helena carelessly. They shook hands, and Sebastian was gone, with the words still echoing after him: 'I wonder how it would have been, if we had never met!'

'How indeed?' he muttered to himself, 'and how is it to be now that we have met? I don't know how it will end, but you shall look at me differently from that, Helena, or——'

CHAPTER III.

IN THE RAIN.

IT was more than three weeks later. The month of August had almost come to its close. The scene was again the bright and cheerful city of Manchester, on one of its typical days. August was going out, as she often does, in Lancashire, with a sullen, streaming rain, which poured on, relentlessly and unceasingly. Helena Spenceley had been struggling all the morning with her pupils, who had turned refractory, and, unable because of the rain to go out, had vented their youthful spirits in a series of experiments upon Miss Spenceley's endurance. They

were not bad children; indeed they had in them 'the makings' of very good children, and were, as their governess had informed Sebastian, as good as their parents would allow them to be. They had been allowed to find out that every one and everything in the establishment was to yield to their comfort and convenience. They knew their power, and used it.

The morning's lessons were over. Usually, at twelve o'clock, Helena took her pupils for a walk, but to-day that was impossible, so they remained indoors, and she was understood to be amusing them. It was a dreary kind of amusement. She had been feeling weary and exhausted all the morning, and now, the close room, the shouting children rushing wildly about, almost overpowered her. She felt herself growing each moment more numb and stupid. At last the bell rang for Mrs. Galloway's lunch, and the dinner of Helena and the children. Pell-mell they rushed in, and forgot for a time, in the pleasures of the table, their quarrels and dis-

putes, relating chiefly to the possession of certain precious objects and fetishes, over which they wrangled with ever fresh acrimony and avidity.

The meal was over, and Helena returned to the schoolroom. The children were to remain downstairs for an hour with their mother. Helena took a chair to the window, and resting her chin upon her hand, looked drearily out upon the streaming rain, the dripping trees, and the misty outlines of other houses in the park. Idle tears filled her eyes, and a lump rose in her throat. She choked both back, and smiled dryly and drearily to herself.

'What a fool I was,' she thought, 'to expect him again! It was a passing fancy. He is naturally polite—that means a little deceitful—and he could not have said anything rough or rude, if he had tried. But he will never come again. It is not likely. I was most foolish to be so glad to see him. I might have known it would bring me nothing but pain and sorrow. I wish we had not met

again, and then, if I had not had the pleasure I should not have had the pain either. I had almost given over thinking of him, and now I have nothing else to think of, and he has everything else. Why did he come and spend that one evening, and brighten everything, and take me into another world, and force me to like him? Why did he ask my advice—as if he wanted it? It was too bad, and I was a fool. But I always was that. He is not shallow—no, it is not that. It is simply that his life is a full one, and mine is an empty one, and that what to him is a chance meeting—a passing act of politeness, is to me a great event—a thing to think about. I wish I had a great deal to do—a work, a regular career. Soon, if these miserable, restless feelings do not leave me, I must bestir myself, and find something more absorbing than this teaching. I have been more dissatisfied ever since I knew that he had the prospect of making himself a name and an influence. And I will do something, too. There must be things to be done; there must

be some way of curing this sentimental folly —some way of working it out, till nothing is left of it. I will find a way or I will die.'

She started as the door opened, and Mrs. Galloway, the mother of her pupils, entered.

'Are you sitting moping, Miss Spenceley? You should never mope,' said she; 'it is a very bad habit, and leads to all kinds of follies.'

'Does it?' said Helena.

'Yes, indeed,' replied Mrs. Galloway, who did not look as if she moped much herself.

She did not either speak or look unkindly; she was only devoid of tact and judgment. She held three books in her hands, and as she spoke she advanced to the window and looked out.

'I am afraid it is not going to clear up,' she began, looking first at the rain, and then at the books.

Helena also expressed the same opinion.

'I am rather in a dilemma,' continued Mrs. Galloway.

'Can I be of any help to you?'

'I was on my way to ask you to do some-

thing for me; but I had no idea how very wet it was, and I do not think it fit for you to go.'

'Was it to go out?' asked Helena, wondering whether it would not be pleasanter to brave the elements than to return to her task of teaching the little Galloways that day.

'The fact is, Mr. Galloway forgot to take the books to Mudie's this morning, and we had arranged to have some reading aloud to-night, and——'

'I will go and change them for you with pleasure,' said Helena, almost with animation; 'only the children——'

'It will do the children no harm to miss their lessons this afternoon; in the depressed state of the barometer, it is cruelty to make them study. But it is such a day——'

'Oh, I don't mind. It will do me no harm; I don't take cold easily, and I can take an omnibus from Oxford Street, you know.'

'Really, since you don't seem to mind, I think——'

'I will get ready now,' said Helena.

'I can lend you a waterproof,' suggested

Mrs. Galloway, to whom it did not seem to occur that a cab would be the most effectual kind of waterproof.

'I have one, thank you; I am ready now. I will put the books in this strap. Have you put a list with them?'

'The list is quite ready. Then you will bring the books back here?'

'Yes,' said Helena cheerfully, so pleased at the prospect of escaping the afternoon's lessons that she would willingly have gone if, in addition to the rain, it had blown a hurricane.

Mrs. Galloway followed her to the hall-door, uttering deprecating observations, and Helena, unfurling her umbrella, stepped out into the rain.

After a short walk through the damp, soaking avenues of the park, she at last emerged in Oxford Street, and stood waiting in the wet until an omnibus came by. It was nearly full, but Helena managed to squeeze herself in between two stout 'Turkish merchants,' and opposite a fat old woman with a bundle. Who does not know and

love the classic atmosphere of a crowded omnibus on a wet, close day?

The omnibus took her to Market Street, from whence she took another walk into St. Ann's Square, and turned into the Barton Arcade, sacred to Mr. Mudie's library and fancy shops. Her enthusiasm was beginning to glow less brightly. She felt very wet, very draggled, and very tired—exceedingly tired. She went into the library, and found herself alone there. The young man who came forward to serve her looked almost compassionately at her, and remarked what very bad weather it was. Helena languidly agreed with him, and presented her list. He gave her two heavy, massive volumes of travels, and she took them. They would not go into the little strap which had held the three-volume novel, and Helena was in that mood in which a trifling inconvenience makes one feel that it would be best to put an end to one's existence at once.

'Suppose you were to take only one volume,' suggested the young man.

'No, I'll have both,' said Helena stoically, manfully seizing them, and going on her way.

As she left the library some one almost knocked up against her, some one who was going, like herself, towards St. Ann's Square.

'Beg your pardon. Oh, Helena—Miss Spenceley! What, in the name of all that is damp, brings you here on such a day?' asked Sebastian, stopping suddenly, and looking at her.

To meet him thus, after her recent reflections, came upon Helena with almost a shock; but she mastered herself quickly, and said:

'I have only been to the library.'

'Only been to the library! Suppose you give me those books. I have tried to call at your house again,' he added, 'but I have been so awfully busy. You would see all about my acceptance and Mr. Lippincott's resignation in the papers.'

'Yes; I did not expect you to call again,' said Helena distantly.

'Did you not? You speak as if you were offended. What have I done?'

By this time they were in the Square, near the cabstand, and it was high time to decide whether they were going in the same direction or not.

'Where are you going?' asked Sebastian.

'To the omnibus office, till a Victoria Park omnibus comes, and then to Mrs. Galloway's with the books. Where are you going?'

'I am going to see the pictures again,' said Sebastian. 'Don't you think you had better come and see them too?'

'I! Oh, I am afraid I have not time,' said Helena, taken aback by the proposal. 'It is nearly four o'clock, and the books——'

'Oh, never mind the books. I am sure you want to see the pictures; and you must explain to me what I have done to offend you, and we can't do that under an umbrella, in the street.'

He signed to an observant cabby, who drove up, and Sebastian politely handed Helena into the vehicle. She did not know

why she got into the cab, unless it was because Sebastian looked as if he were quite determined that she should do so, and she did not feel able to resist.

'Royal Institution,' said he, and followed her. They drove rapidly away.

'I ought not to have come; it is very absurd,' said Helena uncomfortably.

'I am sure you ought,' he said decidedly.

He saw that Helena's manner was changed. From her gravity and almost monosyllabic answers to his remarks he concluded that she was, for some reason, offended with him. He did not know that three weeks' absence and silence had done more to favour his cause than three months' assiduous courtship would have done.

'Here we are! Now for the pictures!' he observed, as they stopped before the Royal Institution.

Helena laughed nervously, and did not know why she laughed. They stopped to leave their umbrellas with the porter, and she found Sebastian unfastening her cloak.

'Because we shall be here a good while,' said he gravely. 'The pictures are not to be done all in a minute.'

Helena did not resist. It was all very strange—comical almost. She felt as if it had been a pre-arranged meeting, and yet, she solemnly assured herself, that was impossible.

They went up the stairs, bestowing a very scanty meed of attention on the much-talked-of pictures. Sebastian seemed in very high spirits, thought Helena, unconscious that her own cheeks were burning with their old brightness, that the actual sight of her and her eyes had turned her companion's head; that he had thought more of her than of his work since they had parted; that her face, and her eyes, and an orange-coloured ribbon, had seemed to float before his eyes by day and by night, haunting him in all his business, and intruding themselves in the most solemn of committee meetings, or political dinners. She was conscious that whenever she looked at him, he seemed to be looking at her, and,

she thought, often when she was not looking; that there was something in his eyes and his manner which made her tremble strangely, and that she suddenly felt quite certain that whatever might have been the case in the past, he did not care for Adrienne Blisset now.

On that wet afternoon there was not more than half a dozen persons in all the suite of rooms. They walked through one after another, and would probably have gone on for ever, had they not found that they had come to the last: they were stopped by a wall, and could go no further.

'Sit down,' said Sebastian suddenly, taking her hand, and drawing her to the settle in the middle of the room, which was empty, save for themselves.

'You know I am in the midst of electioneering?' said he.

'I supposed so, from what I read in the papers.'

'That has been the only reason why I did not call. Twice I have tried to do so, but with the best will in the world I could not

manage it. And poor Sutcliffe, my manager, is ill, so I have had double duty to do.'

'I am sure you are busy,' she repeated mechanically.

'It is thought that I shall win,' he added. 'The Conservatives seem to have got desperate. No local candidate would present himself, so they had down a Q.C. from the Junior Carlton. I don't fancy he has much chance, though he is a good fellow.'

'Oh, he will have no chance. You will win. I shall be very glad.'

'Will you really? You really meant what you said when you told me I had no right to refuse?'

'I am not in the habit of saying what I don't mean.'

'That is true; but you were very brief in your remarks on that occasion. Do you think that I really can do good?'

'Yes,' said Helena, crushing down all ungenerous remarks which occurred to her and answering him frankly, according to her conviction, 'I do. I think, with your ex-

perience of a different, broader life than most of our young manufacturers have led, and with the practical talents that you have too, you ought to rise to influence. You may do a great deal. I think you have a noble career before you, if you will follow it worthily. And—I—I shall always read with interest of your progress.'

'You really think this, though you so bitterly opposed me upon some other questions?' he asked earnestly.

'Yes, I do. I have seen, not the error of my ideas, for I still believe them to be true and just in principle, but I have seen that a man may be utterly against them, and may yet be capable of very great things. I believe this of you. I shall be sorry if I ever hear of your rising and lifting your voice against these ideas that I believe in; but I shall try to think that my cause is not so important as a great many others, and——'

'But, will you give me a hearing now, while I tell you that my views have changed, too, as much as yours?'

'Have they? How?'

'I always did believe that the woman's cause is man's. I told you that, even when we most disagreed and least understood each other. During these two years in which I have lived alone, I have learned to feel that still more strongly. I have felt that no friend, no *man*, could give me the help and sympathy that I wanted; that no man, and no woman, pitted each against the other, could do any good, but that "the *twain together* well might change the world." I shall never uplight my voice against those theories of yours, never.'

'I am glad of that, very glad. It would have hurt me dreadfully; it would have seemed as if—it would have cut me up,' said Helena.

'How careful I shall have to be, as to what I say and do, now.'

'Because of what I have said? You have a larger public than me to think of. You must do what is right—you must say all that you know of the truth.'

'Helena, will you help me to try and discover what is right and true? I have been wondering for a fortnight whether you would, and sometimes I have dared to hope it. Have I been too bold?'

'You mean——' said Helena, with trembling lips, and a face which had suddenly grown pale.

'I mean that for a year, for more, I have loved you unconsciously, Helena; that since I met you three weeks ago, I have known it to my very heart-depths. Will you help me? Will you be my wife?'

'You forget,' said she, her face grown still paler, and its expression more pained; 'you forget.'

'Forget what?' he asked, surprised and chilled by the tone, yet unable to think that the expression in her eyes was one of indifference.

'You forget whom you are asking to be your wife. You——'

'I am asking Helena Spenceley to be my wife. Who has a word to say against her?' he asked, his face darkening.

'You must remember that I am not alone,' said Helena. 'There is the past: my father, my brother; oh, it is not to be thought of—for you.'

'Is that a roundabout way of telling me that you do not love me, and will not marry me?' he asked, taking her hand, and looking at her until she looked at him. 'I would rather you said it straight out—I am waiting.'

'But I cannot say that,' murmured Helena; 'I do love you.'

'Then let the other things take care of themselves,' said he pleadingly, for something in her face forbade him to draw her to him, or do anything more than plead.

'No,' said she. 'It is not fit that a man like you, in your position, should marry a girl with the—connections—that I have.'

'You mean this seriously?'

'I am quite decided about it.'

'Then good-bye,' said Sebastian, abruptly rising; 'I will bear it as best I can.'

He was going, but suddenly turned to her again and stooped over her.

'Helena,' he said, and his voice was so changed that she looked up affrighted—'is it that your pride is stronger than your love? because, if so, yours is not real love.'

'My pride!' she ejaculated.

'Yes; your pride, which is afraid lest it should be said that I stooped to you? That is the secret of this objection. You would ruin our two lives for the sake of gratifying your pride.'

'Sebastian!'

'Helena!'

'It is not that . . .'

'What else is it?'

She was silent, in pain and uncertainty, till he said:

'*My* pride is not so great as my love. You have conquered me, Helena. I would go through fire and water to win you. Once more, will you tell me again to go?'

His voice had sunk to a whisper. He was leaning over the settee, and she, with a sudden shiver at the idea his words conjured up, looked up to him. He stooped, by an

involuntary, instinctive impulse, and kissed her.

'Must I go, or may I stay? Answer me, my darling?'

'Do not go!' said Helena, almost inaudibly, and Sebastian stayed; but he could not conceal from himself that he had yet much to win, much service to do, before he could call Helena his own.

She loved him; she said so; she felt it, but she was proud: he had been right when he said so. Despite her love, she was half-ashamed, half-angry at finding herself conquered, and the glance was a shy and wavering one which he met. It was a strange fact, that though he wished very much that Helena would ask him to go home with her, though he had a couple of hours to spare, yet he dared not venture to hint at the invitation. All he could venture upon was to say to her:

'You will allow me to take you to Mrs. Galloway's, as it is late?'

'Yes, please,' said Helena, rising.

And they went downstairs. Sebastian gave

Helena her umbrella, carried her cloak, opened the door for her, in a strange silence. She had just accepted him, and yet he had never felt so completely held at arm's length before. Helena's own shyness and timidity effected what the most cunningly laid stratagem could not have accomplished—they raised her lover's fervent admiration into absolute worship. He called a cab, and in it they drove towards the Victoria Park. When they were nearly there, Sebastian, unable to endure the silence any longer, said:

'Helena, when may I come to see you? Will you not even look at me?' he added almost vehemently. 'You cannot know how hardly you are treating me.'

'Hardly!' she repeated. 'I—it is so strange. It is a most wonderful feeling.'

'But pleasant, I hope?' suggested Sebastian earnestly.

'Oh, very!'

'Then may I come soon to see you? To ask Mrs. Spenceley's consent——'

'Oh! there is Mrs. Mallory. I am sure

she will object,' said Helena suddenly, and with animation.

'Leave her to me!' said he, almost impatiently. 'See, Helena, we are almost at the park, and you have not given me one look, one word to tell me that you are really mine. I have not deserved to be so treated.'

'Forgive me!' said she suddenly, in a voice of tenderness. 'I was so unhappy this afternoon before I saw you, and now I am too happy for words. I am afraid of my happiness. Come soon to see me, and I will try to behave better.'

She looked at him at last with an April face, beneath whose showers lay a broad and fathomless heaven of love. Sebastian was satisfied.

'And I may write?' he asked.

'Yes, do!' returned Helena, and the cab stopped at Mrs. Galloway's door. Helena and the books got out, and Sebastian Mallory drove away again, to the station—and a meeting.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONQUEST.

'MY dear Mallory, I am glad to see you here at last! Were you unexpectedly detained?' asked Canon Ponsonby, greeting Sebastian at the door of the room in the town-hall, in which the meeting was to be held. It began at half-past seven, and that time had been already past when Sebastian arrived.

'I was very unexpectedly detained,' replied the young man, pressing Canon Ponsonby's hand with a fervour which seemed a little extravagant to that gentleman. 'But I am quite ready now, quite fit,' he added. 'Sup-

pose we go to the platform. They seem to be getting impatient.'

They ascended the platform, and Sebastian was surprised at the heartiness of the greeting he received. He had not known how popular he was, and in his present mood he felt absolutely touched by these signs of goodwill on the part of the 'people.' All things combined to-night to rouse and inspire him. One or two, even of his warmest friends and supporters, and most earnest admirers, had said they feared Mallory's coldness of manner might be mistaken for indifference, that he was a little too prone to betray some of the contempt which he felt for party and party feeling; and had a way, in the extreme philosophy of his radicalism, of saying things which might be mistaken by the uninitiated Thanshope mind for distinctly Conservative expressions. On this occasion, these doubting hearts were agreeably deceived. Sebastian's tact came strongly into play; he made one of those fortunate speeches, in which the right was happily touched off, and in which the truth was told.

without disturbing people's feelings. He felt himself penetrated by an enthusiasm as rare, with him, as it was agreeable. Every now and then he seemed to lose sight of the sea of faces below him, and to see only one; his own voice seemed to die away, while Helena's voice bade him do what was right, and tell the truth as far as he knew it. Under that influence questions which had hitherto seemed even a little contemptible were suddenly revealed as susceptible of being raised and ennobled; and the effort which he had at first thought of making, chiefly in compliance with the wishes of certain friends, and because he felt (like Myles Heywood) a thirst for constant work wherewith to fill up his life—this effort, not a very hearty or enthusiastic one, was now changed completely by the consciousness that there was not only Sebastian Mallory, indolent and indifferent by nature, to be consulted, but also Helena Spenceley, earnest, vehement, and enthusiastic, who would exult in his success, and be bitterly disappointed by his failure. Indeed, she was so calmly con-

fident that he would win, that he felt he dared not lose. All this combined in his favour that night. There was no want of unanimity in the voice of the meeting. The speaker was so carried away himself that he carried his audience away with him. They separated in the highest good-humour with him and themselves—full of confidence in their candidate, and of amiable contempt for his Conservative opponent.

There followed a gathering of some of his friends, and supper at home. Politics, and nothing but politics, engrossed the conversation, and it was late when Sebastian found himself alone. He drew a long breath of relief, but checked it again immediately—as he remembered the interview which was to follow.

'Best get it over at once,' he reflected, going to the drawing-room; but finding it empty, he went upstairs, and knocked at his mother's dressing-room door.

'Who's there?' she asked.

'It is I—Sebastian. May I see you for a few minutes?'

'Come in!' was the answer, and Sebastian entered.

Mrs. Mallory was seated before her looking-glass, and her maid was brushing her hair.

'Be quick, Emma,' said she; 'and sit down, Sebastian; I shall be ready directly.'

He threw himself into a low chair by the hearth, and in two minutes was lost in a pleasant, pleasant dream.

'Now!' said his mother's voice at last, and he speedily awoke to reality again.

The lady's-maid had twisted up her mistress's hair into a loose knot; in the gaslight, with the soft frills of her dressing-gown round her neck, she looked a very young and handsome woman.

'What beautiful hair you have, mother!' he exclaimed, struck with its gloss and abundance. 'Why do you cover it up with a cap?'

'Is that all you have come to say?' she inquired dryly. 'What kind of a meeting did you have?'

'It appeared very unanimous and successful. Ponsonby said it was, and he ought to

know. I wish you had been there. I saw a good many ladies.'

'Very likely; but not ladies of my opinions.'

'Ah! I forgot,' said Sebastian, smiling.

He felt soft-hearted to-night, and hardly noticed his mother's coolness.

'Have all those men gone?'

'Yes; the last of them has departed, and I am glad of it. But I did not come to keep you talking about Radical meetings, mother. I wished particularly to see you to-night; I have something to tell you.'

Mrs. Mallory knew in an instant the nature of the coming communication, and prepared herself to hear something disagreeable. She had not omitted to provide her son with many opportunities of changing his estate. She had had plenty of visitors at her house, and chiefly young lady visitors. None of them had had a hundred thousand pounds, but equally none of them had been quite portionless, and all of them had been more or less good-looking, and what are called 'nice girls.' She had seen all her efforts wasted; had seen Sebastian studi-

ously polite and amiable, even putting himself out of the way often to attend her and her visitors when they wanted an escort. She had seen him follow them to concerts and dances and garden-parties; she had seen him play the host—and nothing else—to admiration; and she had seen the look of relief which dawned upon his face when the duty could conscientiously be left, and he could return to his books, his plans, and his business—that business which seemed to have become the very breath of life to him, and from which no girl, however nice, could succeed in drawing him away.

But some one had at last found this power—probably some one whom she would dislike excessively. Most probably he had met Adrienne Blisset again somewhere; had proposed to her a second time, and been accepted. Mrs. Mallory thought she would have preferred him to come and tell her that he was going to marry any one—a barmaid, a milliner—any one rather than 'that girl,' whom she hated with a virulence which grew with time.

'Indeed!' she made answer, and left him to inflict the blow. It was exactly as she expected.

'I am going to be married, mother.'

'To be married?' she repeated mechanically. She had long ago said that she had no power over her son, but she felt bitter at this proof of the truth of her words.

'Yes. I hope you will approve my choice.'

'If your choice is Miss Blisset, Sebastian, I shall never approve it, and so I tell you distinctly.'

'But it is not Miss Blisset, mother. She refused me two years ago—she would refuse me now, and she would refuse me through all time. Then I was a good deal cut up about it. Now, I am very glad. No; it is some one whom you used to like very much. At least I always understood you to say so.'

It is a fact that the idea of Helena Spenceley did not once enter Mrs. Mallory's mind. She had so come to believe that her son never would, under any circumstances, turn to her former favourite, that, since the

downfall of Helena and her family, she had altogether dismissed them from her thoughts. Even now, as Sebastian paused, she did not think of Helena, but said, after a moment:

'I cannot imagine whom you mean, Sebastian, and I never could guess things of that kind. Who may the lady be?'

'Helena Spenceley.'

Mrs. Mallory actually started from her chair.

'HELENA SPENCELEY! What will you tell me?'

'You surely cannot disapprove of that. My dear mother, you at one time wished me to marry her. You told me so.'

'You have the most extraordinary, perverted ideas of right and duty, Sebastian. Can you suppose that I ever wished you to marry a girl whose father committed suicide after behaving in a far from honourable way in his business affairs; and whose brother absconded with a large sum of money which he had stolen, and who is now—who knows where he is, or what he is doing, or what trouble he may cause his relations even yet?'

Sebastian almost smiled at the utter opposition of his mother's ideas to his own. They never saw but one side each of the other's nature—not because neither had another side to show, but because of the formation of their respective mental eyes. Yet, for the sake of appearances, he must argue the matter out.

'Suppose we had married at the time you wished it,' he suggested. 'These things would have happened all the same. As it is, they are now nearly forgotten. No one with any feeling would wish to remind her of them. If you could only see her, you would forget them all, in looking at herself. She was always a beautiful girl, but now she is lovelier than ever, and more charming.'

She was silent.

'Will you not say you approve of this, mother? You know I will not seek a wife with a fortune. If she had happened to have money, well and good; but I would rather have her without, and with the beauty and the love that Helena gives me.'

'It is a mockery to ask me whether I

approve of it. You will do it whether I approve or not.'

'But if you will approve—if you will hold out your hand to Helena, and accept her as my wife, you will gratify me beyond measure. You know, it is really your fault. You threw Helena in my way at first, and she must have made a much deeper impression upon me than I knew, for a few weeks ago, when I met her unexpectedly, I was scarcely master of myself. It was all over with me from that moment.'

'And suppose I do not approve?'

'I should be unspeakably grieved. We are alone in the world, almost. You are the very nearest relative a man can have; but you will agree,' and he stooped and gently kissed her cheek.

She started. With that kiss seemed to come suddenly to her a great revelation, the revelation of the love which she had thrust obstinately away from her. She had received her son as a child, and had tried to curb and control him; and when he acted

as a man, she had enclosed herself within a wall of icy reserve, and had repelled every advance he had made. The truth rushed upon her mind now with overwhelming force. She was a selfish, a profoundly selfish, woman; but somewhere, not quite withered away within her, there lay the remains of a mother's heart.

'I am your mother, Sebastian,' she said, with a sudden tremor in her voice. 'It is very strange that we should have got on so badly since you came home. . . . I have had no wish but for your prosperity and well-being, and yet——'

'I know you have. I fear I have not been all that I might have been to you. Forgive me!'

He refrained, and she noticed it, from even speaking of the other side of the question, from saying, 'You have deliberately set yourself against every plan and project of mine, until at last, in very self-defence, I have been obliged to be silent, and to keep my hopes and wishes to myself.' This be-

haviour was generous, and she knew it was. It appeared that Sebastian did love her, and prized her goodwill. The emotion she felt was not an unpleasant one. And then, as he certainly would marry Helena, she put her hand on his shoulder, and said :

'I consent, Sebastian, though it is a trial. No; I don't mean that I disapprove of Helena. I know a more lovely girl could not easily be found. It is her—— Well, never mind! Are you going to be married soon?'

'Thank you! I thank you from my very heart!' he exclaimed. 'My great fear was lest you should be displeased. Shall we be married soon? I do not know in the least. I am obliged to go abroad before the autumn, and if I can persuade Helena, we will be married before then, but I am not sure that I can. She is not by any means inclined to rush into my arms. She is very much changed. She used to be so impulsive, and to betray her feelings so easily; and now, I assure you, her dignity has already almost overwhelmed me more than once.'

'When you are married, or, at any rate, when you return from abroad, you will want the Oakenrod to yourselves,' she suggested graciously.

'My dear mother, I hope you will stay in it exactly as long as you feel disposed to do so. Helena wishes very much to please you,' he added, drawing a bow at a venture.

'Does she? When next you see her give her my—my love. Perhaps I had better go and call upon her.'

'Or I will bring her over here to spend the day with you.'

'Yes, perhaps that might be better. Has she given up any of her old notions yet?'

'We both find that our views on these points are considerably modified, so that we are quite able to meet each other and agree together.'

'I am glad to hear it. I think it must be getting late.'

'It is indeed! You must excuse me, mother. I seem to have found more than a

wife to-day,' he added, kissing her hands one after the other. 'Good-night.'

Mrs. Mallory drew her son's face down, and kissed him, strangely moved.

'Good-night, my son. God bless you!'

Sebastian left her. The conquest was won. From that day Augusta Mallory was a happier woman than she had been. There was always a certain distance about the intercourse between her and her son and his family, but there was amity and concord; and later, when Helena won triumphs by her beauty, grace, and spirit, which no money could ever have purchased for her, and when Mrs. Mallory heard on all sides of her beautiful and charming daughter-in-law, she began to think that after all Sebastian had not done so badly, even in a worldly-wise point of view; and her respect for him increased accordingly.

* * * * *

In the course of a week the election came off, when the Radical candidate headed the poll by a large majority. Despite the exceeding business of that week, Sebastian had

found time to pay several visits at 57, Woodford Street, and there had used such arguments with Helena that she had consented to the early marriage he wished for. Sebastian, Mrs. Mallory, and Canon Ponsonby went over to Manchester one evening, and the next day there was a small wedding at a quiet church in some fields.

Helena was given away by her uncle of the uncompromisingly-truthful disposition. Mrs. Mallory looked calmly dignified. Mrs. Galloway was there, subdued by the fact that Helena had taken the liberty to contradict her hypothesis that governesses always make disastrous marriages. Mrs. Spenceley was there too, weeping in an obtrusive manner; and, when it was all over, they returned to their respective dwellings, except Helena and Sebastian, who went to the London Road station, to a compartment in the Euston express marked 'engaged.' They were on their way to Germany, but before they arrived at Euston Square Sebastian had told Helena the whole history of his earlier love for Adrienne,

and his own misty conjectures as to how things stood between her and Myles Heywood—a recital which aroused the romantic Helena's most compassionate and interested feelings—and so ended Sebastian's courtship.

BOOK IV.

QUITS.

CHAPTER I.

'1*st Friend.* Well, you've tried it: is your problem solved?

2*nd Friend.* I have lived so long in the dark, I do not know.

1*st Friend.* Out, into the wind and sunshine then, and try!'

WHAT is the difference, save in size, between one manufacturing town and another? How will you say, reader, on the first view, where this town lies to which I am about to lead you? You shall have heard no word of the language of its people, seen none of its customs, only

had a quick bird's-eye view of it, with its long chimneys and its canopy of smoke, its blackened grass and dingy trees. Not to make the survey tedious, let me say that it is no English town, but a German one. Let us not linger longer than is needful in its streets: here is a sloping road that leads to the railway station; and here, after ascending the hill, we are within the great noisy arena.

Amidst the crowd of hurrying passengers and phlegmatic officials, one figure stood perfectly still on the platform, waiting quietly, and looking composedly around him with quick, observant eyes. Whether a German, an Englishman, or even a Frenchman, the casual observer would have found it hard to say until he spoke, and then the accent would have betrayed the Englishman.

He was much changed. The two years' of absence, the better outward circumstances, the habit of authority, the necessity of accommodating himself to a life new and strange to him, together with whatever inward thoughts might have had their part in moulding and

shaping his mind, all these had had their influence. He was still Myles Heywood; but between him and himself of two years ago, there was just the difference that there is between the reflective man and the passionate child.

As he stood waiting, a little round, quick-looking, fair-haired German man came up to him and began to talk to him.

'Now, Mr. Heywood, you have finished your business in the town?'

'Yes, Herr Sternefeld; I am as you may see, waiting for the train to Eisendorf.'

'How goes all there? The old man is in rather feeble health, I hear.'

'Yes. He has not been strong this summer. He thinks he will be better when the cooler weather comes.'

'Ah!' said the little German, 'and still he keeps grinding away at the business?'

'Yes,' said Myles rather indifferently; 'or rather, I do. He leaves it pretty much to me at present.'

'Yes, to be sure,' said Herr Sternefeld, with

a somewhat significant nod and smile. 'And there's your train. Herr Süsmeyer will be glad to see you back again. *Au revoir!*'

He bustled away, and Myles, stepping forward to take his place in the Eisendorf train, soon forgot him.

From the great manufacturing town of ——feld, the home of turbulent spirits and birthplace of social democracy, to the mining and manufacturing village of Eisendorf, was some three quarters of an hour's railway journey. The way was so thickly set with factories, houses, great collieries, and other evidences of manufacturing industry, that scarcely had these been left behind and a strip of green grass and some distant hills been allowed a chance of showing themselves in a purer air, than they, too, were swamped, as it were. More collieries, more great buildings, cranes, hoists and a canal, became dominant in the landscape, while the train rolled into Eisendorf.

Myles got out of the train, and left the station. Going quickly in the September

evening through the busy main street, he presently turned aside and went down a kind of alley, at the end of which lights and trees were visible. It was the way into a restauration and *Biergarten*, much frequented by the middle and better class of Eisendorf. Here, on almost every evening in the week, music was to be heard, and here, beneath the trees, one might sit and take one's supper.

This was apparently Myles's intention, for he walked through the lighted garden, seated himself at one of the tables, and gave an order to a waiter, who presently returned bearing a dish, a table-cloth, and all the other paraphernalia of a supper.

Myles did not spend a long time over this meal. The table was soon clear again, with the exception of the indispensable bottle of yellow wine, and the accompanying green glass. He leaned his elbows upon the table before him, and stared dreamily forward across the garden, beyond the groups of merry guests — young men and girls, and whole families, with *Vater* and *Mutter* in full ampli-

tude; he seemed to see none of them. The band in the orchestra, fifty yards away, were playing soft strains; the lamps twinkled with a mild, pleasant brightness; the trees above them looked ink-black by contrast. The sky beyond was like a vault of violet crystal, and the lamp-like stars beamed out mildly here and there. The breeze rustled gently now and then, but it was a very gentle breeze, with nothing of the storm in its breath. All around was the hum of laughter and talk, and the murmur of flirtation; now and then the clanking of spurs, and the rattling of swords as the company was reinforced ever and anon by fresh specimens of the inevitable lieutenant; it was all very pleasant, very calm and peaceful. Myles, somewhat languid after a long day's business in the de-oxygenised atmosphere of the offices and warehouses of a large town, felt, at the moment, perfectly neutral; neither glad nor sorry, but content, so far as he was anything, to sit still, with his arms on the table, taking an occasional drink of his pleasant, if not strong straw-coloured

Neckar wine, and listening to the whispers of the band, as one instrument after another died away in the final bars of a little serenade of Haydn's. He would have been content to stay there for an indefinite time, for Myles had arrived at that mental state in which a man finds it easiest and pleasantest to go on doing the same thing. Whether the thing were work or idleness, was almost immaterial to him, when he had once begun it. It was the effort of turning his attention from one thing to another which brought mental pain and inconvenience. All day he had wrought hard, and asked nothing better than to continue doing so. So long as he could go on, he was almost at ease. But when the work was over—when the offices were closed, and men had finished their toil, and were going home to 'play them'—to use an idiom of his own native dialect—then it was that despondency seized him; then it was that he felt a sudden blank, an emptiness, a sense of being lost and unprovided for; then it was that the effort to find some other pastime, something else with

which to fill his thoughts, was a dull pang which he dreaded continually. It was this feeling of desolation that kept him sitting up till all hours of the night, with book and dictionary open before him, studying or reading, until his eyelids fell over his weary eyes, and he could go upstairs, certain that he would fall asleep as soon as he tumbled into bed. It was this which made him dread to awaken in the night-watches, or to lie awake with nothing to do; this that, as soon as he opened his eyes in the morning, made him rise instantly and begin to do something. He had got an unconquerable horror of those hours of silent thought and meditation which had once been a joy and a privilege to him, as they are and must be to all robust, properly-ripening minds.

It was for this reason that, being tired with his work, soothed with eating and drinking, and pervaded by a feeling of quiet calm and contentment unusual with him, he felt reluctant to move, and sat on, his handsome bronzed face set in a gravity that

amounted to solemnity, and a fixed listlessness in his dark and brilliant eyes. Soon, he knew, the transient pause would be over—for the contentment was abnormal—soon the aching sense of desolation and unrest would return, and he would have to awake again.

Very soon, indeed, the spell was broken. A party of young men, strolling through the gardens, saw him, greeted him, and sat down beside him. They began to talk—persisted in drawing his attention to this girl, and that girl, and in asking him if he had heard this piece of gossip or the other.

They were well-conditioned, kind-hearted young fellows enough; they had liked him, and had treated him with friendliness ever since his advent amongst them, and they continued to seek his company, in spite of his unvarying sedateness and gravity. Myles, in these latter days, was courtesy itself to all who merited courtesy; if Adrienne Blisset could have heard the yea, yea, and nay, nay, of his daily communication at present, she would have been quite unable to accuse him

of being 'scornful,' or 'disdainful,' as she once had done. What she might have felt about the little air of proud, absent, patient indifference, who shall say?

Despite absence and indifference, Myles was very well liked amongst the better sort of the young men of Eisendorf. They were of various nationalities; chiefly, however, German, Dutch, and English, with a sprinkling of French. They were all engaged in commercial pursuits, with the exception of one or two young professional men, and an occasional 'lieutenant'—that much-laughed-at, much-abused equivalent of the English curate. It was known—Myles had never attempted to make any secret of it—that he had left a workman's situation in an English town, to come and be the overlooker at Herr Süsmeyer's works—that since then he had rapidly risen to the post of manager and head-man; that Herr Süsmeyer had greatly attached himself to him; and it was thought more than probable that Herr Süsmeyer's son, Julius, would never abandon his favourite

occupation of travelling in foreign lands, and that when Herr Süsmeyer had provided for the said Julius, he would most likely retire, and leave his business in the hands of Myles Heywood, who—so every one agreed—was quite the most proper person to succeed to it.

Myles happened to know better—to know that Julius Süsmeyer was even then on his way home, with every intention of devoting himself to the career of a merchant, but, at Herr Süsmeyer's request, he had not named the fact.

He sat, this evening, listening to the talk and jesting of the others for some little time, and then rose.

'Why, are you going?' cried one of them. 'Why not stay here? The evening has only just begun. It's only nine o'clock. I expect we shall have some dancing in the Saal when the concert is over.'

'Thanks,' said Myles, with the gleaming smile which lighted up his dark face; 'dancing is not in my line, as you know.'

'No,' said a young Englishman, laughing.

'One would almost as soon expect to see old Michel Angelo's Juliano de Medici step from his pedestal and begin to dance, as you, Heywood. . . . Now that I look at you,' he added thoughtfully, putting his head on one side, 'there is a likeness, actually; at least about the nose and mouth. Look here! If you were to put your hand across your face, so——'

'And twist my other arm into a commanding position—thus—you would see a man in the attitude of Michel Angelo's "Pensiero Medici, and that would be all. Good-night!'

'Odd fish, Heywood!' murmured his countryman, shaking his head. 'I wonder if he was ever less solemn than he is now.'

The object of that speculation took his way out of the gardens and the town, walking northwards, along a road leading to that suburb in which lived most of the more wealthy and distinguished inhabitants of Eisendorf. He walked for half an hour, or more, till he arrived at the house of Herr

Süsmeyer, the largest and pleasantest of all these residences. He went up the dark garden walk, and pulled the bell; soon the great door was thrown open, and he was in the presence of his chief, a delicate, kindly-looking old man, with a gouty foot laid up on a stool before him, and a crutched stick leaning against the table, which stood hard by his easy-chair. The table was covered with books and papers; a reading-lamp cast a softened light over the page which the old man was reading. He was quite alone; there was perfect rest and perfect stillness around him.

He glanced up over his spectacles, and laid down his book, as if well-satisfied when he found who his visitor was.

'So late!' said he. 'I had hardly expected to see you to-night, after your long day's work. What business in ——feld?'

Myles entered into details as to the business he had done, with an incidental disquisition upon the state of trade in general at that time. Then the conversation drifted off into other channels.

'Your holiday-time will soon be here,' observed Herr Süsmeyer; 'you mean to spend it in Berlin, I think you said?'

'I shall go to Berlin, amongst other places,' said Myles, who had assumed the very attitude which the young Englishman had wished him to take, and who sat, his hand half across his face, looking out, through the open window, into the darkness of the garden. 'I suppose I shall wander from one place to another. I do not much care where I go. You know it is your doing, sir, that I am going at all.'

'I wonder that you should go to Berlin, from one town to another. I should have thought the green woods and fresh air of Thüringen, or——'

Myles shook his head.

'No; I don't care about the country. It is dull.'

'Or to England, to see your friends?'

The young man started.

'No—oh, certainly not,' said he. 'The last place I should wish to go to. No; Herr Süsmeyer, with your introductions and through

your kindness, I shall meet with friends in Berlin and other places, and shall see a great deal that is interesting, and which I have long wished to see. I shall come back here refreshed and ready for work again, until your son——'

'We can talk about that when Julius arrives. Time enough, time enough! I hate changes,' said Herr Süsmeyer. 'Meanwhile, I have had very good news to-day—excellent news.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; a letter from Sebastian Mallory.'

'Ah! Is he coming, then?'

'He is coming—yes, but not alone,' said Herr Süsmeyer, a smile of much satisfaction playing upon his face. 'He will bring his bride with him. What do you think of that? He says I must see her. But you say nothing; you did not know?'

'His bride!' repeated Myles, in a low voice. 'No, I did not know. But—when does he come?'

'In a few days. They are already at

Cologne. They will travel through Düsseldorf and ——feld, and come here for two nights only. Then they are going on. It is their wedding-tour. I have already given orders,' continued the old man, 'to receive them. I must make much of my friend Sebastian. It is as if a child of my own brought his bride to see me. I have ordered the guest-chambers to be prepared, which have not been used since the death of my blessed Amalie, my wife.'

Thus the good old man prosed on, with childlike pleasure in the prospect of meeting 'his' Sebastian again, and of seeing his bride, so engrossed in the anticipation that he did not even look at his listener, who sat still, composed and pale, hearing distinctly all that was said, and occupied, he too, in picturing the scene: how Sebastian Mallory would lead forward his bride, who would be glad that his old friends were pleased to welcome her. Myles could exactly realise how she would go up to good old Herr Süsmeyer with both hands held out, and eyes shining with happi-

ness, and he—perhaps he need not be there at all; but, at any rate, if he only kept sufficiently in the background he would not be observed, and he could bear his pain alone. This stroke had been long delayed, but it had come at last—as he knew it must. Those words he had heard spoken in the Thanshope Park had held good. Why there had been so long an interval he could not tell; he had often wondered, had many a time sought the papers through with sickening anxiety, and had never yet seen what he expected and dreaded to see. But at last all uncertainty was over. He could never doubt again: and now, he thought to himself, life would be much easier to live, for he had too much sense to bewail his lot when he knew what it was; it was uncertainty which was so wearing, and no doubt it was uncertainty which had caused all his mental pain and distress. Now, certainly, things would be better.

Thus consoling himself, he rose to take his leave of Herr Süsmeyer, who shook hands with him, thanked him for calling, and said:

'You know, you too must see Mr. Mallory. He will wish to see you; indeed, he says so in this letter.'

'Yes, I shall see him, of course,' said Myles.

Then he went away—walked back to town, to his lodgings; found his lamp burning, and his books open as he had left them; said to himself:

'Now, at last, I can study with a mind at ease,' and straightway prepared to do so.

In vain! Echoes from a life that he had tried to believe lived out thronged in his mind, and resounded there. Faces seemed to flash past him, and voices to ring in his ears. All sorts of scenes vividly recurred to his mind: always he and she were together; always there was exquisite delight mingling with his pain, till he recalled the scene in which Frederick Spenceley had come scowling through the committee-room, in the great distress. It was after that that his life had become so intolerable to him. His thoughts wandered off to the Spenceleys in general.

Of course he had heard of the great failure; of Mr. Spenceley's suicide; of Fred's dishonourable flight. What was the wretched fellow doing now? he wondered. And there had been others: a good, homely-looking mother, who seemed ill at ease under her greatness; and a daughter—he remembered her too—the most beautiful girl in Thanshope, so every one had said, and Myles also had been compelled to give her his meed of admiration when he saw her, day after day, working with Adrienne Blisset. He had often thought what a contrast they formed—like a beautiful crimson rose and a white violet: the one with her fair hair and delicate, pale face; the other with dusky locks and great dark eyes, the rich colour that came and went, the vivid life in every movement, the splendid attire. Yes, he remembered her—she was most beautiful; but to him a violet was more exquisite and precious than the most gorgeous rose, and it seemed other people shared the same opinion.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE OR VIOLET?

TWO days later, Myles took his way, in the evening, towards Herr Süsmeyer's house. The travellers had arrived, he had heard, early in the forenoon. There had been a ceremonious *Mittagessen*, or mid-day dinner, at which different treasured friends of Herr Süsmeyer's had been present—friends also of Sebastian in former days. Myles, too, had received a pressing invitation to be there; but, feeling that he would much rather descend of his own free will into the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and there spend the remainder of his natural life, than sit a long

three hours (for German congratulatory dinners are not amongst the briefest of ceremonies) at Herr Süsmeyer's table under the proposed circumstances, he had declined, on the plea that it was a very busy day at the works, and he could not possibly be spared before evening. At the evening meal (the *Abendbrod*), Herr Süsmeyer insisted that he should be present; and Myles, not quite sure, when it came to the point, that the last arrangement was not worse than the first, had perforce consented.

The house was lighted up, he saw, as he approached. There were lights in the windows of those guest-chambers which had once been the pride of her life to the *selige Amalie* of Herr Süsmeyer. There, in that house, under that roof, he was to meet Adrienne again—no longer the girl whom he might dare to love because she was free, but, as the wife of Sebastian Mallory, henceforth to be looked upon with other eyes. A rush of recollections, sweet and bitter alike, filled his mind for a moment, and were very strong.

But his will was still stronger. He had not

endured his years of sorrow, trial, and probation, to emerge, at the last, a weaker and worse man than he had been at first. He was prepared to endure the pain that awaited him, *peine forte et dure* though it might be—to endure and perhaps, in the end, to conquer it; to bear it, moreover, so that it and its cause should be known to himself alone.

It was with a feeling of sadness, but without any of bitterness, that he entered the house. He felt clearly and distinctly that he could meet his successful rival without a feeling of grudging or ill-will.

He was ushered into the large, commodious room which was Herr Süsmeyer's library, and in which he always sat when alone, or with intimate friends. Myles, going in, saw his old master in his gala dress of faultless black cloth and dazzling linen, his gouty foot laid up on the stool before him; his best-pleased smile upon his face, looking up to where Sebastian Mallory stood talking, his elbow resting on the top of the piano. There was no one else in the room. Sebastian, who was

looking towards the door, changed his position quickly as Myles came in, and went to meet him with outstretched hand.

'Ah, Heywood, I am glad to see you again. We were talking about you at this instant.'

Myles found it strangely hard, at first, to return the greeting; but he sternly beat back the grudging feeling which momentarily raised its head, and spoke with cordiality. How well Sebastian looked! How happy! How self-possessed, and at harmony with life and circumstances—naturally, thought Myles. He had everything to make him so. He was little changed. Perhaps there was a degree more of animation or abruptness in his manner; a little more of the active combatant, and less of the amused bystander, looker-on at the world's game. That was natural too, thought Myles, and to be expected, while Sebastian was thinking he had never seen any man with manner, expression, almost appearance, so completely changed as this 'revolutionary weaver,' as Hugo von Birkenau had once called him. He could scarcely realise the

excessive change which had taken place. All the old, froward defiance appeared to have vanished, and instead there was

> 'The reason calm, the temperate will;
> Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill,'

which were the qualities he himself most highly prized in man and woman. They stood patent on his ex-workman's broad brow, in his steady eyes, and upon his firmly, though not sourly set lips. Sebastian was divided between pleased surprise and self-congratulation on his own foresight; for, from the first, he had hoped and expected to see Myles turn into something of this kind.

Occupied with these feelings, the two young men scarcely spoke, but left Herr Süsmeyer to do the talking, which was exactly what he wished. The first thing that really roused them to reality again was a remark of Herr Süsmeyer's:

'Your dear wife (*Ihre liebe Frau*) is absent a long time, *mein Bester.*'

'Oh,' said Sebastian, with a sudden flash of

the eyes, which did not escape Myles, 'she will not be long. I told her at what time you took your supper. She was resting when I saw her.'

'So!' said Herr Süsmeyer, adding, for the hundredth time, 'I trust she finds herself accommodated with all she wants upstairs.'

'Oh, everything, thank you. She says she thinks German hospitality is the most delightful she ever had.'

'German hospitality!' thought Myles. 'Strange! She passed her happiest years in Germany; she told me so.'

While he was marvelling at this (to him) peculiar remark of Sebastian's, the rustle of a silken gown became audible on the polished floor of the passage; *she* was coming now.

'There she is!' said Sebastian, catching the sound too, and starting forward to open the door.

'I hope I'm not very late,' said a voice—(silvery, though not *the* voice)—and it was just at this moment that Myles began to

wonder if he were labouring under some wild and extraordinary hallucination—whether long brooding and the last blow had really driven him mad.

He was conscious, but in a dream-like, unreal manner, of rising, as Sebastian led a lady into the room—a lady who laughed a happy laugh. He was conscious, also dreamily, of seeing a figure which had been in his thoughts quite lately—a tall, superbly-shaped, queenly figure—not the figure of Adrienne; of seeing a lovely face, glowing with a soft flush of health and happiness; of meeting eyes which, for darkness and fire, might match his own; of seeing a long, white throat, a dress of silk and lace, rings flashing on white hands, and a dazzling smile making the brilliant whole more brilliant still. Nothing like a sweet violet, indeed, but a rich and gorgeous rose, in the full pride of its queenly beauty.

'Helena, this is Mr. Heywood, of whom you have often heard me speak. Heywood, Mrs. Mallory.'

('How fearfully she stared at me, dear!'

said Helena afterwards. 'He is really a very remarkable-looking young man, and I liked him when I had talked to him; but he stared most alarmingly at first.')

Myles was still dimly aware that the brilliant vision, which he kept expecting to see fade away like a dissolving view, to be followed by that of Adrienne, held out her hand graciously, saying something about, 'My husband has often told me about you,' or words to that effect; and that he took the hand, and bowed over it—very creditably, considering his state of mind. Then Sebastian placed a chair for—yes, his wife—it must be his wife, Myles argued within himself, and the conversation was taken up, and he listened to it in silence for a time, gradually comprehending that he had been labouring under a delusion, but a different delusion than he had imagined. By-and-by he became able to answer some remark addressed to him by Helena, and then she continued to talk to him, and Myles found himself being drawn out to show to the best advantage, saying

clever things which he had had no idea that he could say, until they were elicited by the tact and sympathy of a woman like Helena. Still, he could not altogether get rid of the sensation that he was in a dream, and he continued to feel so for the rest of the evening.

When he was going away, Sebastian asked him if he could see him on the following morning.

'At any time you please,' said Myles.

'Then I will call at the works in the forenoon. I can soon say what I have to say.'

On that understanding they parted.

CHAPTER III.

WHICH WINS?

THE following forenoon, while it was yet early, Myles saw Sebastian coming through the great yard, towards the office where he sat. His face wore an expression of gravity — even of trouble—and he frowned thoughtfully as he came along.

Myles took him into his private room. He could not help thinking of how he had received him on that eventful morning when he came driving up to the office at Thanshope with Hugo beside him, and Myles smiled a little sadly at the change.

'You came on business, perhaps,' suggested Myles.

'Yes; but I had no idea myself, until about an hour ago, how pressing the business was. Herr Süsmeyer and I were talking about you last evening before you came. He tells me his son is on his way home, and that he intends devoting himself to business.'

'Yes; I believe that is true.'

'Under those circumstances, I presume, your position would be somewhat changed.'

'Certainly. It would naturally become more subordinate.'

'Will you like that?'

Myles shrugged his shoulders.

'Herr Süsmeyer was talking to me about it. He gave me a very high character of you. He very much regrets your having to take a secondary position. He says he would be very sorry to part with you for many reasons, but not if you left him to your own advantage.'

'Does Herr Süsmeyer want to get rid of me?' asked Myles.

'On the very contrary. He only wishes to see your position improved. I may as well come to the point. You would hear that I have been returned as the representative of Thanshope, in Parliament.'

'Yes. I think the Thanshope people showed their good sense there, at any rate,' said Myles, with a smile.

'Let us hope so. But you will easily understand that such a position will take me away from home a good deal, and make me unable to attend to my business as fully as I have done.'

'Naturally,' said Myles, with a sudden, quick glance upwards, as he first saw the drift of Sebastian's remarks. His face flushed, and he rose from his chair, pacing about the room.

'For some time Mr. Sutcliffe has been quite unfit for the post he held. I mean, as regards bodily health. I have wanted very much to provide him with an assistant, but did not know how to manage it without hurting his feelings. My conversation with Herr

Süsmeyer decided me to ask you to take the post. Since then—in fact this very morning—I have a telegram from Wilson with the news of poor Sutcliffe's death. I cannot tell you how sorry I am. I liked him well. Such faithful probity, such diligence and such capacity, are not found in one man in a hundred. But, long ago, I thought I had discovered them all in you, and my errand to you this morning is to ask if you will take Mr. Sutcliffe's post in my business. Your energy, vigour, and the talents for business which Herr Süsmeyer tells me you have, would be invaluable to me, and without doubt the connection would be an advantageous one for you. What do you say?'

Myles had come to a stop in his restless walk—his hands plunged in his pockets, his brows knit, his eyes somewhat downcast. He did not look elated. His first words were not an explicit answer to Sebastian's question.

'I think you are the most generous man I ever knew, sir,' he said at last, almost abruptly.

'That is beside the question. There is no talk of generosity, but of a business connection, a contract entered into by us for our mutual advantage.'

'It would at least be very much to my advantage. Have you not considered that there are plenty of men, employers like yourself, who would be glad to see sons of theirs placed with you, and would furnish capital too, as a premium?'

'*Mon Dieu!* yes, I know. I have had hints to that effect from more than one already. It does not suit me to do anything of the kind. I don't want a young gentleman with capital, whom I shall have to teach. I want a business man, who can really take commercial care off my shoulders when cares of another kind are laid upon them. I am not a fellow to do things in a hurry. The whole matter has been well-considered, and it is a great object with me to secure you. As to terms, we could come to some satisfactory arrangement, I doubt not. What I want to know now is, will you come to me,

and take the place of manager of my business ?'

Again Myles began to pace the room, biting his lip and frowning desperately.

'You must think me strangely callous and indifferent, not to jump at such an offer,' he began.

'No; I see you don't want to come. I know your reasons. No,' he added, as Myles started, 'not your very reason, but I know that when you left Thanshope, it was in the hope never to see it again; and that desire has not yet changed.'

'No, it has never changed,' he owned.

'But, if I guess rightly, there is no actual, tangible obstacle to your return. It is a strong private feeling of repugnance on your own part, arising from some cause or causes to me unknown. Is it not so ?'

'Yes, it is so.'

'Well; still I ask you to come. Come and try, at least. Fight it down, and come and revisit your city of the dead. Come and try whether there may not be new life hidden for you there.'

Myles shook his head.

'There is not that,' said he.

'Then, to put it in another light, come because I ask you, to oblige me. Surely all that wrath and misunderstanding which once existed between us is burnt out for ever now. I am certain we can act together in most things. And—excuse me, I have no wish to be impertinent—but let me tell you that Stonegate is always empty now; and if it were not, I have introduced you to my wife.'

Myles turned abruptly away. Stonegate always empty! Whether empty or inhabited, he had forfeited all right to approach it.

'With the best wishes in the world for friendship, that would have divided us, would it not?' continued Sebastian, who, when he took up the probe, was not wont to lay it down again with the operation half-finished, deterred by the anguished face or fainting mien of the patient.

'Yes,' was the only answer.

'But it is gone. I know not what life may

hold for you in the future; I do know that you have suffered in the past, and that places where one has had that kind of suffering are haunted, and full of ghosts; but again I urge you—come! I think you are leading a morbid, foolish life here, rendered, by the motives which prompt it, not a particularly healthy one, and——'

'Say no more, sir. I will come. I knew I should come, as soon as you asked me. No wish of yours could be other than a command to me now. It was only that I could not force myself to say yes. But now I say it. I will go whenever you like—that is, whenever Herr Süsmeyer will spare me.'

'That is spoken as I hoped you would speak,' said Sebastian heartily. 'Let us shake hands upon it.'

'On my agreement to take you for my lawful master, and serve you faithfully and honestly,' said Myles, with rather a forced smile, as he grasped Sebastian's hand.

'I suppose that is the foundation of all such agreements, but I trust we shall be

something more worthy of us both than mere master and servant. At least, you need not be afraid of rusting. I have dozens of plans which I have never had time or assistants to carry out. Now, with my wife, and I hope you to help me too, I shall get along splendidly.'

'I am glad to hear there is plenty of work,' said Myles. 'I was to have left here in a couple of days, for a holiday. Suppose I went to Thanshope direct, instead of Berlin, and the other places I had thought of. That would leave the field clear to Herr Süsmeyer and his son, and I could get to work at once.'

'Better take the holiday first, hadn't you?' said Sebastian. 'It may be long enough before you have the chance of another.'

'Thank you; but I would much rather go straight to work. The holiday was none of my seeking. It was Herr Süsmeyer's doing.'

'Very well. I will telegraph to Wilson that you will be there in a few days, and he must have the books ready for you. I will just give you an idea of how we stand at

present, and leave you to shake down before I come back, eh?' said Sebastian, with as much nonchalance as if he had been proposing nothing more difficult than that they should take a stroll together. He knew—this astute young man, the kind of nature he was dealing with. To have proposed coming to Thanshope with Myles, and there standing by him and smoothing out his way for him, would have been in the highest degree distasteful to the latter. The charge imposed upon him was a heavy one; it promised him arduous and incessant occupation for some time, at least until Sebastian's return from abroad. Already the idea of Thanshope looked less like a grim phantom. The way became practicable. He brightened visibly, to Sebastian's private amusement.

'Yes. How soon will you return?'

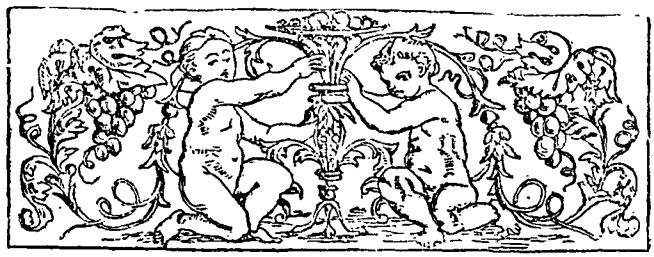
'It is impossible to say. It will depend a great deal upon the reports you send me. This is my wedding tour, really, though it has had a queer beginning, and I think my wife has a right to complain of being dragged about to

German manufacturing towns in order to settle business matters, when I promised to take her to the Italian Lakes. We shall try to go on there, and to Switzerland, and make a regular holiday of it, before coming back to settle really to business. You will do the best you can.'

'Yes, of course,' said Myles. 'I hope and think that my reports will allow you to take a pretty long holiday.'

'Then I can go,' said Sebastian. 'We leave to-morrow morning. Suppose you come up to Herr Süsmeyer's to supper to-night, as you did last night, and we will take an hour afterwards for business—yes? And now I must be off.'

These rapidly-made arrangements were all faithfully carried out. In less than a week Myles, armed with Sebastian's explanations and instructions, was on his way to Thanshope.



CHAPTER IV.

'Yet, ere the phantoms flee,
Which that house, and heath, and garden, made dear to thee erewhile,
Thy remembrance, and repentance, and deep musings are not free
From the music of two voices, and the light of one sweet smile.'

IT would be difficult to overrate the completeness of the change which had supervened, in both the outer and inner life of Myles Heywood, between the time when he had left his native town, and now, when he returned to it.

He was very busy, very quiet, and very lonely. Sebastian had acted with the soundest wisdom in leaving his new manager to take

his place alone, and alone to fight down the obstacles which he encountered, alone to strike back the ill-will, the jealousy, and the insubordination—all of which things raised their heads and gaped upon him with their mouths on his first assumption of his new office.

Myles had accepted the post calmly, but he had known perfectly well that he assumed no light task. It would have been comparatively easy, if there had not been the envy and prejudices of old friends to be overcome. Thanks to the first-rate management of Mr. Sutcliffe, and to Sebastian's own ubiquitous eye, the whole machine was in complete working order; but this, perhaps, only left all the more room for smaller spites and jealousies to make themselves felt. There was, first of all, Wilson, the faithful old cashier, who had once been Myles's superior: he was a first-rate accountant and bookkeeper, but no manager or man of business, and utterly devoid of the faculty of arranging or regulating things. None knew it better than himself,

yet it was something of a trial to his feelings to see the young fellow, whom he had known from the time when he had begun life as a 'half-timer' of eleven, placed over him. In justice to both the men, it must be said that this little jealousy soon wore off. Myles won Wilson's heart by his manner of treating him with scrupulous respect in the presence of third persons, and without pretensions of any kind when alone with him. Wilson, too, was an intelligent man, who knew a clever man of business when he met him. Myles very soon proved his perfect capacity for his post, and after that Wilson's soreness was at an end. He backed up 'Mr. Heywood' on every possible occasion, and suffered no appeal from the said Mr. Heywood's behests.

Myles found it a somewhat more difficult matter to dispose of others, old comrades of his own, who were working away in the same old places, no higher than they ever had been; and who, unable to rise themselves, were lost in astonishment that he should be put over their heads. Some of them were

strongly inclined to be provokingly familiar: first jocosely, and then maliciously, insubordinate; utterly unconscious of the mental gulf between him and them. But the stronger brain and will of the man who had risen beyond them was able to check these manifestations of feeling. One or two sharp examples, and a most unequivocal demonstration that no nonsense would be endured, reduced them to their natural places. Ever afterwards he had the name amongst them of having become hard, inconsiderate, and a fine gentleman. He knew it and regretted it, but accepted it as inevitable, remembering the time when he had resented the fact that the law did not compel all men to live on the same level.

The new manager's eyes appeared to be ubiquitous—nothing escaped them; but good work and good conduct were as keenly noted by him as bad, and he let the approval be as distinctly felt as the displeasure. There was, moreover, another thing, which soon began to tell more than all the others put together:

he was utterly unconscious of deserving ill-will; he was so evidently bent upon work, hard work, and nothing but work, and not upon hectoring it over those who had become his subordinates, that distrust gradually subsided. Sneers and scoffs had no effect whatever upon him; they were ignored in a manner so complete as to recoil with disconcerting effect upon their originators. That grave, absorbed face, those eyes which noted everything, that ready presence of mind, that seemingly unwearying, untiring strength, that utter disregard of the amount of work which fell upon his own shoulders, soon began to tell upon individuals, and, through them, upon the mass.

Myles wrote Sebastian regular accounts of his business transactions, hoping they met with his approval. He never named any disputes with the workpeople, leaving his master to infer that he was, as the latter had said, 'shaking down' to his new work.

Outside that work, his life was rather colourless. Mary and Harry no longer lived

at Thanshope. Harry had found work in a manufacturing village some five miles distant; he lived in a cottage on the borders of an open moor, where the air was pure, free, and bracing. He had grown, physically, much stronger in consequence of the change, and thought that his hearing, if not actually better, did not become worse so rapidly as when he lived in the town. Occasionally, on a Sunday, Myles would go over to see them, and nurse his sister's little boy on his knee, feeling a passion of tenderness which he could not express for the little round-faced thing, with its large, solemn, dark eyes—like his own, Mary said, with affectionate pride. He would walk with Harry over the moors, and gratify him by shouting descriptions of his foreign life into his failing ears. But, except for this one day in the week, they were lost to him; their incessant toil, and his own, prevented further intercourse.

Very often his dead brother occupied a place in his mind. Poor Ned! what a life he could have given him now! He could have

had him to live with him, and bought him books and pictures, and given him music, and made his existence a poetry to him. But it was too late: Edmund slept his quiet sleep, killed off by the want and the sorrow which had been too much for them all, at the time of the great distress.

One face was missing—that of Hoyle, his old enemy. Myles made some casual inquiries about him one day, and heard that he had left Thanshope about a year ago. He never knew the part the man had played between him and Adrienne.

The young men who had once been friends of his (it seemed as if it must be hundreds of years ago), and to whose debating society he had once belonged, received him with a mixture of timidity and admiration. Many of them had advocated—perhaps still did so—the Proudhonistic theory—'all property is a crime.' At one time Myles had believed and ardently advocated the same delusion. He had lived faster and grown faster than these old friends of his, and now they were divided

between embarrassment at his open support of one of the most flagrant property-holders of the district, and admiration of his cleverness, which had swept such gains into his own lap. Myles felt little sympathy with them, and had the uncomfortable sensation that, while they were shy of discussing things before his face, they were very voluble, and chiefly about himself, behind his back.

He found his most congenial associate in Mr. Lyttleton, the Factory Inspector of Thanshope and some surrounding towns, who lived in Thanshope—a middle-aged, highly-educated man, who was attracted, the first time he saw him, by the keen, yet sombre countenance of Mr. Mallory's new manager; and who, when he learnt the outlines of Myles's history, became still more interested in him, asked him to his house, and there introduced him to some young professional men, of a higher class, taken all in all, than those he had known in Eisendorf. The benefit was mutual, and Myles's circle of acquaintances, if not of intimates, thus gradually extended.

Almost everywhere he pleased, but everywhere there was the constant wonder why Heywood was so reserved, so almost melancholy in manner, and so sparing in speech; 'much more like a Spanish grandee,' observed a young doctor to Mr. Lyttleton, 'than a man who has risen from the ranks of the working-men. I can't make the fellow out.'

Very few people could make the fellow out, though many seemed to find a decided pleasure in trying to do so.

Thus time passed until Sebastian and his wife came home, and then Myles found that 'master and servant' was indeed far from expressing the relation which Mallory wished to exist between them. Sebastian's regard, once won, was dealt out with no niggard hand. He had got Myles to yield to his will; now it seemed he wished for more than respect—regard. The best part of Myles's nature responded to the call; his liking warmed each day, till it grew to an affection, reserved and reticent indeed in outward show, but inwardly glowing as warmly as Sebastian himself could

desire. The former ill-will had burnt itself out. Master and man were on a footing of perfect amity and accord. The more Myles heard of Sebastian's plans, thoughts, and schemes, the better he liked them, and the wiser he felt them to be. He could appreciate them now; three years ago he could only have scoffed at them. He entered heartily into them all; he worked unremittingly till Sebastian declared he was afraid of his energy, and refused rest, saying he neither required nor desired it. Whatever his own private and personal hopes, thoughts, or wishes (if he had any), he kept them strictly and entirely to himself. Helena was very kind to him, and they were very good friends; she, woman-like, always thinking of that background in his life, that hinted love-story, of which Sebastian had given her some glimpses. Occasionally she and her husband would speak of it.'

'Sebastian, you know him best, and what he is capable of. Do you think he is in love with that girl yet?'

'I think, most reverend matron, that he is in love with that girl—who, by-the-bye, is rather older than yourself—yet.'

'Then why doesn't he find her out and propose to her?'

'I have not asked him.'

'He cannot think she is too good for him.

'I should not be surprised if he did.'

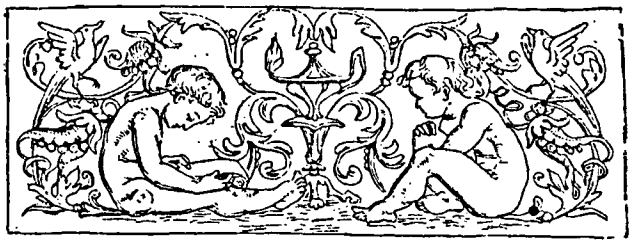
'Absurd!'

'Pray take it upon yourself to tell him so. No doubt you will succeed in convincing him.'

'You are ridiculous, sir.'

When he, Myles, had by any chance, a leisure hour, he would go—even after the nights had grown dark, and frosts of winter had set in—up the dreary length of Blake Street to the wicket of the empty Stonegate, and leaning upon that support, would stand gazing at the emptiness and the desolation of it. No one lived there. A woman came some few times in the week, and spent the day there, lighting fires and throwing open shutters and windows; but that was all. It had always, at the best of times, been a dreary-

looking, sad, cold place, but now it was forlorn in its mournfulness. If it had not been so utterly lonely, Myles would not have gone there. No one he knew ever came past. He had his watch-post to himself, and probably found some kind of mournful, unsatisfactory joy in his vigils. Always it remained the same—empty, closed, desolate—always void of her presence—always without sign or indication that it would ever again be gladdened by it. Her name had never been mentioned, either by him or his friends. He was absolutely ignorant of where she was, or how; of what she was doing, whether she were happy or sad; of every fact and circumstance connected with her.



CHAPTER V.

'Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen;
Du, du, liegst mir im Sinn;
Du, du, machst mir viel Schmerzen—
Weiss' nicht wie gut ich Dir bin!'

THE spell—the long silence—was broken at last. One evening, towards the end of April, when he had been seven months in Thanshope, he first had any news of Adrienne. The Mallorys were in London, and had been there since the opening of Parliament in the beginning of February. Myles had had all the work and responsibility at home laid upon his shoulders. His work for the day was over, and, the evening being fine, and the air

pleasant, he turned out for his usual stroll up Blake Street. As he came nearer to the house, he saw a man standing in the garden, and as he approached still nearer, he recognised the man ; he was Brandon, Mr. Blisset's old servant and factotum.

The windows in the front of the house were all open, and glittering in the rays of an April sunset—mild and cool. Brandon was standing, looking meditatively towards that sunset, and towards the moors to which it formed a flaming background. His hands were in his pockets, and he was softly whistling a tune.

Myles paused, and the man turned round. There was a mutual recognition. Brandon had been three days in the town, and had heard all the gossip there was—all about Myles's changed position, and while he looked pleased to see an old acquaintance, he touched his cap as to a superior. Myles, wishing him good-evening, rested his elbow on the gate, and said :

'Are you living in Thanshope ?'

'No, sir. I only came here for a few days on business.'

Myles was gratified that he could at once satisfy the deep yearning that lay at his heart —to ask after Adrienne—and at the same time do what was natural and to be expected; for who, if not her uncle's old servant, should know anything about her? He therefore inquired:

'Do you ever hear anything of Miss Blisset now, since Mr. Blisset's death?'

Brandon looked surprised.

'Hear of her, sir! I am in her service.'

'In her service?' repeated Myles mechanically.

'Yes. When my late master died, Miss Blisset was good enough to say that she particularly wished me to remain with her, unless I had other views, which I had not. I have served her and her family for thirty years, and I hope never to serve any other.'

'I had no idea you had remained with her. I am glad to hear it. She must require a

person to—an old servant, who will be like a friend to her as well.'

'Miss Blisset was so kind as to say, when she asked me to remain, that she looked upon me as a friend. My wife and I are the only servants she has.'

'Ah! How is Miss Blisset—or rather, how was she when you left her?'

'She was quite well, sir, thank you.'

'Does she live in England?'

'At present she is living in London, and we have been at Florence and Dresden.'

'Indeed. Does she mean to stay in London?'

'I think she will stay until autumn. Then she is going abroad with some friends. I am not sure where, but I think to Italy. Most likely she will take either my wife or me with her, and leave the other behind.'

'Then she does not think of coming to Thanshope at all?'

'No. Her lease of this house expires directly, and she is not going to renew it. She

has seen Mr. Mallory in London, and made arrangements to give it up. I have come to see about storing the furniture.'

'Yes. When shall you be returning?'

'In about three days, sir, I expect.'

'The house will then be empty.'

'Yes.'

There was a pause. Myles's heart was beating. Brandon was looking at him inquiringly as if he awaited some further word or some message to be delivered to his mistress. But Myles dared not send any message. He could not forget how he had ignored her own message to him, though head and heart alike cried out that he was wrong. In ordinary concerns he was clear-headed and practical enough: where his love for Adrienne stepped in, his nature seemed changed; he became timid, nervous, and lost all self-confidence. To have sent a mere conventional phrase of compliments or kind regards, would, it seemed to him, have been deliberate, insolent bravado—after what had passed. If he could have seen her, if she would have spoken

to him, he might have confessed his fault and begged her pardon ; but there was no word, no message that he could send through even the most trusted of old servants—through any third person.

After a few more words with Brandon, he wished him good-night and moved on, leaving that worthy man to think how ill-mannered he was. 'And he used to sit and look at my young lady in a way that any one must have noticed,' thought Brandon rather indignantly.

Myles walked homewards, deciding in his own mind that he would not go near Blake Street again until after Brandon should be gone. He pictured Adrienne in London, with plenty of friends, visiting the Mallorys, happy —the man had given no sort of hint that she was not happy. Suppose he happened to be in London, to be in the same room with her, to pass her in the street! He had forfeited the right to claim her acquaintance; he did not think he would have the courage to address her. He had made a great mess, a

horrible mistake, when he repulsed that advance of hers; for that it had been an advance there could be now no doubt, since there had never been anything between her and Sebastian Mallory. What a shock, what offence that behaviour of his must have caused her! The dead silence which had supervened on her part, showed how she must have taken it.

His heart ached a good deal as he walked towards his home. What profited him all this solitary, lonely prosperity? If he could have exchanged it all for one more of those evenings at Stonegate in the old days—for one more of those glances from Adrienne, which used to intoxicate him with their half-frank, half-timid expression—he would have flung all he had to the winds, and begun life again to-morrow, if he could have seen her once again betrayed into such a look, such a tone as that with which she had said, 'Oh, Myles!' one Sunday afternoon. But that would never be. She too, had found that Thanshope was not the place for her. She would never come to Stonegate again. When next he saw it, it

would be empty, dismantled, a shell. He wondered—and immediately felt eager that it should be so—whether Sebastian Mallory would let *him* have Stonegate. There was no other place in which he cared to live. A fear seized him, lest it might already have been promised to some one else. He hastened his steps, and as soon as he got in, wrote to Sebastian, and dropped the letter with his own hand into the letter-box. He had written urgently. If Mr. Mallory had not already disposed of Stonegate, might he, Myles Heywood, become its tenant, at whatever rent Mr. Mallory pleased, even to the half of his income? Repairs and everything of that kind (he mixed up business and sentiment in a hurried jumble) were to be his concern, and his alone. And might he have an answer soon? He did not care whether the reasons of his eagerness were guessed or not by Sebastian.

By return of post he had an answer:

'DEAR HEYWOOD,—

'I am glad to find there is something

you seem to care much about, outside business. Since Miss Blisset is leaving Stonegate, I could have no other tenant so desirable as you, and I assure you applications have not flowed in with the rapidity you seem to think. You are at liberty to take possession as soon as she vacates, which I suppose will be in a few days from now. It is not a residence which I should have exactly chosen out from amongst all others, but *chacun à son goût.*

'Yours truly,

'S. M.'

Myles carried this note about with him in his breast-pocket, as if it had been a magic talisman. He studiously adhered to his resolution not to go near Blake Street till the three days of which Brandon had spoken should have elapsed, but the shadow of the deserted house 'haunted him like a passion' —a longing, intense and increasing, concentrated his thoughts upon that 'house, and heath; and garden,' the 'phantoms' of which had been 'so dear to him erewhile.'

Not until the fourth evening after his interview with Brandon did he again take his way along the familiar street.

It was even such an evening as that earlier one. The air was mild, the sun, now declining, had been bright—all nature smiled. It was growing dusk as he drew near the house. Why was his heart so low? Why had he such a great sensation of loneliness—of being cast adrift. Why did sad words of a sad song ring in his ears, and seem to be borne in whispers to him with each breath of wind—

'Away! away! to thy sad and silent home!
Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth!
Watch the dim shades, as like ghosts they go and come,
And complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth.

'The leaves of wasted autumn woods shall fall about thine head,
The blooms of dewy spring shall gleam beneath thy feet,
But thy soul or this world must fade in the frost that binds the dead,
Ere midnight's frown and morning's smile, ere thou and peace, may meet.'

He felt the idea dreadfully prophetic; he

felt as if that were the fate he had selected for himself, as he at last rested his arms upon the homely wicket of that lonesome abode, and looked towards the front of the house.

He was prepared for closed shutters, melancholy wisps of straw and scraps of paper—doors bolted and barred—such as mark with a brand not to be mistaken, the deserted house. What he beheld was an open door and an open window—the window to the right-hand; he could see that the hall was stripped of its fittings—that the windows were curtainless, but the house was not empty—as yet, its hearth was not 'desolated.'

What is that moving within the room? A figure; perhaps one of 'the dim shades, as like ghosts they go and come.' So dull are our senses, when night is falling, that even he did not recognise whose form it was; it was not to a sight, but to a sound, that his nerves suddenly thrilled, and his senses became tense and alert.

As he stood, a chord was struck upon a

piano within—another. A slight shiver shook him, but still he was not convinced until a voice floated out—the softly melodious voice which he knew in every fibre of his heart, not loudly, but with a subdued intensity of feeling which made him also absolutely tremble. For the song she sang brought hopes, doubts, fears—and again, wild and tremulous, chaotic hopes, crowding into his mind. It was the homely old German *Volkslied*—

'Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen.'

To every word his heart throbbed, as she apostrophised, with the abandon of one who believes herself unheard and unlistened to, that absent one—

'Thou, love, shrined in my heart,
Thou, love, shrined in my mind!'

and sang how he 'caused her much pain, and knew not how much he was loved.' A pause after that, till she went on to the second verse—

'So, love, e'en as I love thee,
So, so, by thee I'd be loved.'

'For,' said the song, 'I must ever be drawn most tenderly towards thee.'

('Die, die, zärtlichsten Triebe
Fühle ich ewig auf Dich.')

Towards thee—towards whom? Her voice vibrated, almost failed, as she went on with a sad, pondering accent, to the wonder expressed in the third verse, as to whether *he*, that absent one of the careless spirit, might be trusted, as he might trust to her; and the notes swelled out again—

'Weiss nicht wie gut ich dir bin.'

Myles's head had sunk down upon his arms. The wonder, the mystery, the wild hope, that came surging over his heart almost unmanned him, and still the voice floated out, as she sang the last verse of the song. *Could* it be? Might he dare to hope that, as she chose *that* hour, that place, that song in which to express her feeling, that it *was* he—for she was singing now—

'My love, when in the distance,
In dreams thy face I see,
My heart with fond insistance,
Turns evermore to thee.'

Whose face? Her voice had faltered with the energy of her own feeling, on the last lines—

'Dann, dann, wünsch ich so gerne,
Dass uns die Liebe vereint!'

She sang the last cadences again, as if she could not leave them, as if weary of waiting and separation—

'Ja, ja, ja, ja!
Dass uns die Liebe vereint!'

With a heart full of the wildest, most chaotic doubt, wonder, surmise, Myles stood, his head raised again, his dark eyes burning, as their wont was when he was agitated, upon the open window. The dusk was too deep now for him to see anything in the room.

His brain, his heart, all of him, were thrilling with the aspiration conveyed in the last untranslatable words of the song—the passionate, simple, primitive—

'Dass uns die Liebe vereint!'

He saw nothing, heard nothing, until a footstep paused, as if arrested in surprise,

beside him—a figure interposed itself between his eyes and the window at which he was gazing.

'*Adrienne!*'

The name fell, like a sigh, without his will or wish, almost without his knowledge, from his lips. He scarcely knew himself, or where he was, or anything, except that she stood there, and had paused, stopped, was looking at him. It was light enough to see that she had recognised him on coming close to him, and that, when their eyes met, she was trembling.

When she looked into his face, her own turned paler, and a startled 'Oh!' fell from her lips.

For a moment they both stood silent thus. Then, Myles, seeing that she still trembled and looked startled, remembered suddenly where he was, and how it all was. He bared his head and stood before her, saying, in a low voice:

'Pardon me! I forgot! I will not intrude. I did not know you were here.'

He had turned to go, was absolutely moving, when she herself opened the wicket wide, and said, in an indescribable tone :

'Will you leave me without one word, as before ?'

The tremulous appeal was a command. He entered the garden, looking at her, as if awaiting a direction from her ; but at last he said :

'It was that which made me fear to look at you. I can scarcely believe you will speak to me. Do you mean,' he added, with a sudden appeal in his voice, 'do you mean that I may come in, and—talk to you ?'

For all answer Adrienne held out her right hand, and closed the wicket with the other, so that they stood together within the garden.

Myles took that hand, but he could not at first speak.

'Miss Blisset, I behaved unpardonably—like a ruffian—two years ago. I do not deserve your forgiveness.'

They had been moving towards the house,

and they now stood in the almost dismantled drawing-room, by the open piano.

'At first,' said Adrienne, in a voice which still trembled, 'I thought I never could forgive you. It was cruel on your part——'

'It was brutal—unpardonable.'

'No; you were mad with grief—I knew it afterwards—and you could not know what it was I had to say to you.'

'What was it?' he asked, below his breath.

'It was to say good-bye, and something more—to say that I feared I had been unkind: I had seemed to desert you—in your trouble, but that it had never been so in reality, for I had thought of you constantly; and,' she added steadily, 'to tell you, too, that I had heard something—that some report had been set going about you and me——'

'You heard *that!* It was to spare you that—it was because I was almost mad at the thought——'

'It was to tell you that I prized your friendship beyond all those slanders, and that nothing could ever shake it. I did wish to

tell you that; but after you were gone, after you had left me in that manner, Myles, I dared not write.'

'Fool that I was! But I have been paying the price of my folly for two years without ceasing. Till seven months ago I believed you were going to marry Sebastian Mallory. You may suppose I was anxious for nothing so much as to be silent—to hear nothing of you.'

Adrienne made no answer, till Myles said:

'And now you are going to leave Thanshope?'

'Yes, for ever.'

'You have come to say good-bye to the old place?'

'I never meant to come. Brandon found some difficulties about the arrangements I wished him to make, and telegraphed for me. I came this afternoon, and am leaving again to-morrow morning.'

Adrienne had lost her self-command as he gained more of his. Her voice shook uncontrollably, and she leaned her elbow on the top of the piano.

'I shall always feel happy that I have been able to see you, to tell you that, whether you forgave me or not, I have repented, and do repent, my churlishness, and to thank you for your—your *unspeakable* kindness to a rough, stupid, clumsy fellow like me,' said he. 'Your great goodness and your gentle influence will go with me through my life; and—may you never know a sorrow or a care as long as you live!'

The aspiration appeared useless, for Adrienne had buried her face in her hands, and was weeping with a quiet sorrow that had something of despair in it.

'But before I go,' he added, 'will you answer me a question? Perhaps I have no right to ask it, but I must. I have been listening to your singing; I heard every word.'

'Yes,' was the almost inaudible answer.

'Tell me if you had some one in your mind when you sang that song.'

'Yes,' said Adrienne, still scarce above her breath.

'You had!' he exclaimed, and forgot the solemn farewell, the almost benediction, he had just bestowed upon her, while he hurried his words out desperately. 'Oh, Adrienne! forgive me if I am too presumptuous; but have mercy! Tell me, when you sang, "Du du, liegst mir im Herzen" . . . . But I am too bold—I——'

'Do not look at me so strangely!' she began, raising her tear-stained face. 'Tell me—— Ah!' she suddenly exclaimed, as with one movement they clasped each other, 'it is you, Myles—it was always you; but you were so dreadfully proud.'

'Do you mean,' he asked, after a long pause, 'that if I had come to you that night—if I had forgotten myself, and told you, as I felt sure I should, that I loved you, and that no "friendship" could be anything but a wretched mockery to me—do you mean that *then* you would have taken me, ruined and wretched, and without one bright thought or one hope for the future?'

'If you had come then, and told me all

that, you need not have gone away without hope, and I should have spent a different two years than I have done. But it is all right now,' she added. 'The probation is over, my love, and you have borne it bravely.'

'If you think so, it must be so; but at the time, I assure you, I felt anything but brave. *Now* I feel—I feel at rest,' said Myles.

There was silence. The darkness gathered. The air blew softly in at the window, and bore with it the faint sound of an old tune, in broken, melodious chimes.

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

S. & H.

00077521

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018